















AMONG THE LINDENS



*By the Same Author.*

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THE LITTLE LADY OF THE HORSE.

*Illustrated by Frank T. Merrill.*

THE MUSHROOM CAVE.

*Illustrated by Victor A. Searles.*

A CAPE MAY DIAMOND.

*Illustrated by Lilian Crawford True.*

Square 12mo. Cloth, extra. \$1.50.

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THE LITTLE RED SCHOOLHOUSE.

*Illustrated by Victor A. Searles.*

Square 12mo. Cloth. \$1.25.









BEARING IN HER ARMS THE BASKET OF CHRYSANTHEMUMS.



# AMONG THE LINDENS

BY

EVELYN RAYMOND

AUTHOR OF

"THE LITTLE LADY OF THE HORSE," "THE MUSHROOM CAVE"

"A CAPE MAY DIAMOND," "THE LITTLE RED

SCHOOLHOUSE," ETC.

Illustrated

BY VICTOR A. SEARLES

BOSTON

LITTLE, BROWN, AND COMPANY

1898



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# AMONG THE LINDENS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A KINDLY DEED.

“**L**OOK out! Oh, look out, sir!”  
“Is the man senseless?” cried a second voice.

“This way, sir — this way — quick! Dear me! Are you hurt?”

The school-girl who had uttered the first exclamation darted suddenly forward into the midst of the crowd, and pulled from under the very hoofs of the horses, attached to a heavy dray, the queer little old gentleman who had occasioned her outcry.

Every New Yorker knows how thronged is that particular point, at the southwestern corner of pretty Madison Square, where Broadway, Fifth Avenue, and Twenty-third Street — all favorite thoroughfares of the shoppers — meet to shake



hands, as it were; while each adds its complement of humanity on foot and humanity in vehicles to swell the current eddying about the corner.

A gay and lively place it was, on that early afternoon. All the curbstome merchants had come out with their mechanical toys, forever getting under the pedestrians' feet, tripping them up, and threatening more than one with mischance.

Among such was an old gentleman whose dress was quaint and out of style, while his manner was that of one unused to scenes of confusion. For some moments he had stood upon the sidewalk, watching with curious interest what went on about him; but when a papier-maché monkey gave a realistic spring from the end of an elastic cord, and clasped his ankle, he stepped boldly forth into the whirlpool of wheels. For half the short distance between curbs all went well; then he slipped upon the slimy pavement, and just where hoofs and wheels were in most hopeless tangle, he fell.

There was an outcry of horror from many throats.

The policeman piloting a party of women over the crossing turned hurriedly, just in time to see



what had happened, as well as a slim girlish figure spring to the rescue.

“Stop! That’s dangerous! Why should two be killed?”

There were groans and execrations from the drivers of carts and carriages, the swiftly forming blockade which follows any break in the routine of city transit, and the patrolman was back, seizing the old man’s shoulder and demanding why he should make so much more disturbance than was necessary by tumbling down in that ridiculous manner. Or if the policeman did not put his inquiry in just those words he made it distinctly evident to Mr. Philipse Chidly Brook that visitors who could not conduct themselves any better than he had done might likely find themselves at the station-house, to be cared for at the public expense.

“Come this way with me, will you? Come this way just for a moment!” cried the old gentleman, and seized upon Bonny’s hand so forcibly that, whether she would or no, she had to follow where he led. This was into the flower-shop close by, and she obeyed readily enough, after all; for she loved an adventure dearly and therefore — so her sister declared — was always meeting with one.



Isabelle, who had been with her all along, now interposed: "Bonny! What are you doing? You must not go anywhere with a stranger. Come away at once!" and she laid her hand in firm remonstrance upon thoughtless Beatrice's shoulder.

"Yes, Belle; directly. But I must see if he is hurt. Come along, too."

"Yes, certainly; come along, too," repeated Mr. Brook, turning toward the elder miss.

"Thank you. It is impossible. Come, Bonny."

But fun-loving Bonny had already followed the man into the shop; where, with a smile of gratitude upon his very muddy face, he asked: "Who are you, my dear?"

"Oh! no matter about that, sir. Are you hurt?"

"Not at all, I think. Time will tell. I might have some cracked bones about my anatomy somewhere, and yet not know it, amid all this whirl and racket. Five-and-twenty years since I set foot in the streets of New York before, and I find them greatly changed. But I must know your name, please. I must know to whom I am indebted for my life. I should have been killed but for your courage, my dear; or have been



arrested and sent to the lock-up, than which I would almost think death preferable."

"Bonny! Bonny Beckwith! Come at once! Mother would be very much displeased! The idea of your following a stranger about in this way!" cried Belle, now opening the door of the shop, and looking threateningly at her sister.

"Directly, dear. Now, sir, can you tell me where you are stopping? If you are such a stranger here, I should think you would better take a carriage to your home—or hotel. After twenty-five years the town must seem like a new world to you, or, I mean —"

"Bonny!"

"Can I serve you, miss?" asked a clerk, coming forward, and Miss Beatrice interpreted his tone to mean: "If I can I wish to do so at once. If I cannot I would like to have the store vacated. This is no rendezvous for adventurers."

"No, I need nothing," said Bonny, and moved to the door, nodding her head brightly toward her old gentleman, but casting rather wistful glances at the counters full of beautiful blossoms as she passed them on her way.

"Wait a moment! Wait a moment, my dear! I have heard your name, you see. Your sister spoke it. Here is my card; and if you will not



tell me where you live that I may call and thank you, at least let me give you a posy before we part. Pick out what you like. Pick out what you like, my dear, and I will pay for it. Here is my card, — Philipse Chidly Brook, New Windsor, New York. Everybody thereabouts knows me, as everybody hereabouts used to know me half a century ago,

‘When I was young as you are young,  
And love-lights in the casement hung.’ ”

Bonny dropped her hand from the door-knob. “Why, that is Thackeray, sir! So you know him, too?”

“Beatrice Beckwith! Will you — or will you not — come? I — am — going!” cried the indignant Isabelle, moving slowly away from her ill-conducted little sister. She was greatly shocked and mortified by Bonny’s readiness to take up with anything and anybody, and was quite justified in her feeling; for in most cases there is danger in any girl following a stranger, for even so slight a distance as Bonny had done, in a great city like New York.

But this time she happened to be safe enough. Old Chidly Brook was a gentleman if ever one lived; and queer and quaint as he now appeared,



time had been when he was a great favorite even in the most exclusive circles of New York's best society.

"My dear, my age is sufficient guaranty of my honor. Do allow me to give you a little bouquet of some sort. No? Then — have you a mother?"

"Certainly. I have a dear, dear mother, who will be troubled if I stay from home longer. Good-by."

"Her name? Her number? I must be allowed to call and pay her my respects!" In his eagerness, which was almost childish, the old man laid his thin hand upon Bonny's wrist.

She glanced down upon it; its delicacy and refinement appealed to her; she longed to know more of its owner, and replied: "My mother is Mrs. Rachel Beckwith, Number Blank, Second Avenue." Then she darted out of the shop and tried to look defiantly into the vexed face of her pretty sister Belle.

But it was of no use. The defiance faded soon, and a whimsical humility took its place. "I'm sorry, I'm awfully sorry, dear, that I didn't mind you. I'm sorry I didn't let the dear old fellow lie there to be hurt. I — No, I don't



mean that. But I'll try to behave next time, I truly will."

"H'm-m!" replied Isabelle; and vouchsafed nothing further till they had reached their home, a cosey if small and plainly furnished "flat" at the location which Bonny had given Mr. Brook.

That old gentleman, left in the flower-store after his young rescuer had departed, turned at once to the clerk. "I saw the child cast her eyes rather longingly, I thought, upon that vase of salmon-colored artemisias. Are they for sale?"

"Certainly," replied the attendant, and moved the vase forward upon the counter. "They are the same thing as artemisias, sir, but the popular name is chrysanthemum. These are prize flowers, from the late show. A rare color. One of our own originating."

"H'm-m, h'm-m. Very pretty, but roses suit me better. However, she looked at these more than she did at the roses and pinks, and I'll take them. How much are they?"

"Seventy-five cents each."

"W-h-a-t? How — much?"

"Seventy-five cents each. Chrysanthemums are the fashionable flower now. All the people at the horse-show —"

"That's what I came into town to see.



Thinks I to myself, Old fellow, brace up yourself a bit and take one more look at life before you step behind the curtain. A great town, young man, and full of pitfalls."

"Yes, sir," respectfully. "Will you take more than one of the blooms, sir?"

"More than one! What do you think of me, lad? If you were going to send a posy to a pretty little girl, would you send her a pitiful, solitary blossom? If you would you ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

The salesman laughed pleasantly, and awaited directions, which came promptly.

"Pick me out the prettiest and biggest basket you have in the shop. Then fill it with these artemisias—if there are enough. If not, finish out with white ones. She looked just like a pretty pink and white blossom herself, with her rosy cheeks and white teeth. And what eyes she had—did she not? Yes, yes; a big basket of posies is a small price to pay for old bones saved from breaking! It must be of the best."

"How will this please you?" asked the attendant, showing a pretty willow affair, shaped like the baskets seen in old-fashioned "Annuals" as held by the hands of high-coiffured dames with sloping shoulders and simpering mouths.



Mr. Chidly Brook was charmed directly. "That's it! That is just the very thing! Some of the good old notions have survived these silly later fashions, then? Glad to hear it! I am exceedingly glad to hear it. Now, young man, will you lend me a pen and paper, if you have such a thing handy?"

"Certainly. Will you, please, step to the desk?"

"Just to write a little note, you know. A sort of *billet-doux*, as we called them in the old days. I was a hand — I was a master hand at writing *billet-doux* then. Let me see. Number Blank, Second Avenue. A most aristocratic neighborhood, is it not?"

"Well — sir — I don't know. It might be. It was once, they say. I —"

"Enough. I hate these eternal 'was onces'! No matter. What will do for a home for that little girl must be a pretty sort of place any way. On our farm, my uncle's, it was just above that grand street of millionaire residents — Fourteenth — What are you staring at, sir?"

"Nothing. Nothing whatever, beg pardon. But you must have known New York for many years. Fourteenth Street is now a synonym for a street of cheap lodging-houses and such; that



is, the resident portion. The business part is fine enough. It will take about forty-three or five chrysanthemums to fill this basket. But we have smaller ones, sir, of the same shape. Will you look at them?"

"I said the biggest. I did n't mean the smallest. Thank Heaven, Philipse Chidly Brook is still able to pay for a decent basket of posies for his little lady, I should hope! Thank you. I will have the note written by the time the basket is filled. And I wish to have especial care used in the delivery of the same. The *billet-doux* is important. I would not have it lost."

"It shall not be. But the filling of the basket will take some time, a half-hour at least."

"No matter. I am not pressed for time. Yet. I will wait."

He did wait, with what those better acquainted with him would have considered an unusual amount of patience; but the truth was that the old fellow had had a pretty severe shaking-up, and now that his excitement over the accident began to ebb, he was more and more conscious of pains and bruises.

Finally, when the basket, perfect in its beauty, was tendered for his inspection, he rose very stiffly and barely looked at it.



“Here is the bill, sir. Forty-three chrysanthemums at seventy-five cents, thirty-two dollars, twenty-five cents; one basket, five —”

“The amount, lad! The amount! I hate detail.”

“Thirty-nine dollars, twenty-five cents.”

“All right. Two twenty-dollar pieces. Keep the change and buy one posy for your girl!” And with this fine sarcasm, as he considered it, the old gentleman left the flower-shop, entered the cab which a cash-boy had called for him, and gave the direction: “Astor House. At once.”



## CHAPTER II.

### PINK PETALS AND BRIGHT VISIONS.

“**Y**ES, Mother; if you cannot persuade Beatrice to behave herself upon the street, I really think she should not be allowed to go out. Her goings on are very mortifying to me, and she is sure to get us into some dreadful sort of scrape yet, worse than that small-pox scare last week —”

“Sweet maiden, all severe! Don’t! That is a sensitive point with your unfortunate sister! The less said upon it the more agreeable!” interrupted Bonny, skipping across the narrow parlor of the Beckwith home, whither they had just returned, and catching the tall Isabelle around the waist with a persuasive little hug.

“What have you been doing now, Beatrice?” asked the gentle little widow, looking up from a piece of wonderful embroidery, and fixing a half-amused, half-apprehensive gaze upon the younger girl’s face.

“Nothing, dear Motherkin, but a simple act of



charity. I happened to see a funny old gentleman tumble down in the middle of the street, and I pulled him out of harm's way. Isn't that a right sort of thing to do?"

"But that is only the beginning," added Belle. "She was not contented with a really kind and brave rescue, but she must go off with her protégé into a store and tell him all about ourselves, and —"

"Isabelle! Not 'all.' I merely told him where we lived. And it was really an act of charity to ourselves. He will make a delightful and very salable model for Motherkin's embroidery. Lend me your pencil, dear. Let me show you!"

"Beatrice, have you done this foolish thing? Did you go with any stranger into a shop?"

"Please don't interrupt the flow of art, Motherkin!"

"If you did, you must never do so again. Leave the person you have assisted to go his way and you go yours. And of all people to get into such affairs you are certainly the most unfortunate child I ever knew."

"I'll try to be good, Mother dear. Only it will be very difficult. He was a nice old man. This looks very like him. You must do his legs in burnt sienna. See? And his coat — his coat



was like a 'picter.' All tight down the back and very high-shouldered as to sleeves, which also were very long and narrow. Do his coat in Prussian blue. His 'weskit' was yellow ochre, touched up with umber; and his hat — alas! his hat had disappeared! His face — Motherkin, he had a nice face. A good face, a — ”

“Like the tramp you let into the house, while we were out, to steal our last half-dozen silver spoons! He, I remember, ‘had a good face, a really intellectual face’!” remarked Belle, gibingly. Her good nature was now quite restored by the pleasure of finding some excuse for teasing Beatrice, who liked to tease them all.

“There, Motherkin! is n’t that ‘sweetly pretty’? Can you not work him into a landscape of trees and cows and clouds and other country things?” demanded Bonny, ignoring her sister, and laying the really clever little sketch in her mother’s lap.

“How do you get on with your singing, dear?” asked that lady, smiling, and taking time from her work to pat the soft cheek of her merry daughter.

“Badly. There is a terrible discrepancy between my chest notes and my head notes. When I try to stretch one up and the other down, some-



thing appears to give way — cr-r-rick-crack-c-k-screech! Shall I illustrate, Mother dear?"

"No, no, I beg! My nerves are in bad condition to-day. But if you'll sing something without nonsense, I shall be glad to hear you. It would rest me, I think."

Beatrice's gay face sobered instantly, and Isabelle laid down her book. "Are you so tired, Motherkin?"

"Oh! no, indeed! Only it is a bit monotonous stitching, stitching all day with nobody to talk to. Never mind. Here comes Roland. I wonder why so early."

The inquiry was in her eyes as she raised them to meet her son's when he entered, full three hours before his usual time of home-coming. But she saw instantly that he was not ill, and, that anxiety allayed, she smiled brightly upon him. "Well, my boy! what good fortune has given you a holiday?"

"Ill, not good fortune, Mother. I—I have been discharged. I have lost my place."

Then, indeed, did a significant silence fall upon the family group. Lost his place! Could anything have been more unfortunate!

"Why, 'Laureate,' have you been writing more soap poetry?"



“No, Bonny ; but I had a row with the boss, and he talked to me so rudely that I made up my mind no gentleman would stand it. So I bolted. That’s all. I was going to leave, anyway, after the holidays.”

“Oh, you were, eh ? Going into soap-poetry for a business ? If it pays as well as your first venture — ”

“Be still.”

“Yes, my dear. But I’ll just make a note of your new words. You will have quite a vocabulary if you keep on. ‘Row,’ ‘boss,’ ‘bolted,’ will rhyme admirably with ‘cow,’ ‘toss,’ ‘moulted.’ I shall take to writing for soap-prizes myself soon. I’ve always had a notion that my genius would develop in a direction not at present suspected by my family. Mother thinks I am an embryo prima-donna ; Belle knows I am a fine dress-maker ; Bob is sure I was born for no other purpose than to make boys’ kites, and Roland must acknowledge he never would have won the soap-poem prize if I had n’t furnished at least one missing rhyme. But — ”

“Bonny, do keep still ! If I were as fond of talking as you, I’d — ”

“Talk ! Hark ! There goes the door-bell. I hope nobody has come to call, for — ” The chat-



terbox did not wait to express her inhospitable reasons, but darted down the narrow passage to answer the summons, and was back almost directly, bearing in her arms the basket of chrysanthemums which Mr. Brook's messenger had just brought.

"Beatrice!"

"For mercy's sake!"

"What in the world!"

"What's that?"

"Oh, oh, oh!" cried the delighted girl, dancing about so that nobody could get more than a glance at her burden of lovely blossoms, until she finally dropped in a little heap at her mother's feet and placed the basket on the drawing she had laid upon her mother's knee. "Such a handy table your lap makes, Motherkin!" she often remarked; but the truth was that everything must be shared with this sympathizing woman or it lost in value.

"Is n't it lovely, lovely?"

"Lovely, indeed! But it cannot possibly be meant for you, dear. Where did it come from? How did you get it?"

"Of course it is meant for me. It came from the store I visited in company with my old gentleman. And I took it out of a messenger boy's hand. Oh! the beauties! the darlings! Now,



Miss Isabelle Beckwith, don't you wish you had not been so impatient? Maybe his royal highness — he must be that, at least, or he could n't afford such a gift — would have sent you one wee blossom all for yourself."

"But I do not understand. I do not know that it is right for you to keep it, dear," remarked Mrs. Beckwith, between the rapid exclamations which fell from the lips of all three young people.

"Now, Motherkin! Of course it's right! It's the very prettiest compliment I ever had in all my life. Don't go for to spoil it with your proper notions, that's a good Mother! But — see here! Here's a *billet-doux*! or I'm a sinner!"

If Mr. Philipse Chidly Brook could have witnessed the delight with which his offering was received, and could have heard the running comments bestowed upon it, he would have been repaid a thousand times. For when his courtly little note, with its old-fashioned writing, was read aloud, even the careful mother had no further reproof for her adventure-loving Beatrice, not all whose chivalrous escapades ended as comfortably as this.

FAIR, KIND, AND MOST RESPECTED MISS, — Allow me to present you with this slight token of my grati-



tude; which I hope to express more fully when I call, this evening, to make my regards to your Mother and her family.

I have the honor to subscribe myself

Your Obedient Servant,

PHILIPSE CHIDLY BROOK.

Of NEW WINDSOR, N. Y., *November Twenty-third, Eighteen hundred and eighty-one.*

TO MISS BEATRICE BECKWITH.

“My obedient servant! My blessed old Prince of Givers! That’s what he should have signed. Seventy-five cents each, Motherkin mine! All lavished on your troublesome girl!”

Mrs. Beckwith did not immediately reply. She took the note from Bonny’s hand and gazed at it musingly, as if trying to clear some confusion of memory. “I have heard that name before — somewhere — besides in history. Let me think!”

“I hope you will hear it again — ‘somewhere’! Here comes my ‘Humpty-Dumpty’! I was wishing he could enjoy this.”

“Hello! Bon! What the dickens is that?”

“Hello! Bob! It’s chrysanthemums, not dickens!”

“Whose is it?”

“Mine!”



“Stuff! That can’t be yours! Where did you get it?”

“It can be mine, it shall be mine, it is mine. It is a reward of merit, the first instalment of many I hope to receive.”

“Tell a feller!” pleaded the eight-year-old boy, who was very like Beatrice, only that his hair was a little rougher, his dark eyes even brighter, his general appearance a trifle more dilapidated.

“I have told a ‘feller,’ and if a ‘feller’ can’t believe I am not to blame.”

“Don’t bother! Tell the hull concern!”

Beatrice slipped her arm around the little chap as affectionately as if his costume were not plentifully bedaubed with street mud, and kissed his retroussé nose squarely on its tip; after which she gave him a history of the afternoon’s incident, told as only Bonny would have told it.

“Jimminy-cracky! He must be richer’n thunder!”

“Robert! Where do you learn such talk? Why will you use such words?”

“Dunno, Mother. They seem to grow somehow. Say, Bon! That basket is worth a heap of money!”

“My brother, you should not look a gift horse in the mouth!”



“ You ’re doing it yourself, are n’t you ? I saw you counting all the time you were talking. So was I. But some of ’em seemed to get away. I bet they is more ’n forty. S’pose they cost much as five cents apiece ? ”

“ Five cents ! Seventy-five is the price of that particular shade everywhere. Think of it ! Do it, — a nice little sum for a nice little boy for a nice little girl who pulled a nice little man out of a nice little crowd on a nice little corner of a nice — ”

“ Bonny, Bonny ! Don’t be silly ! But, indeed, I don’t wonder ! The sight of so much beauty has raised my own spirits till I feel able to fight the world afresh — for you, my children ! But Bonny is right ; don’t, don’t ‘ count the teeth ’ of this lovely ‘ gift horse,’ dears. Put the basket on that white cloth I just finished embroidering, right in the centre of the table. Then let us gather about it and study it. We will all work the better for the lesson.”

“ Motherkin ! you are the dearest, wisest body in the world. Here’s your chair — right up front. And say ! let’s every one tell what she or he sees in the flowers. I suppose that present represents something different to each ; don’t you ? ”



“I suppose with all your practical sense you are still a fanciful child!” responded Mrs. Beckwith, smiling fondly upon the active Beatrice, who was, indeed, her mother’s “right hand” of dependence in their every-day life.

“Well, if I am, I think it is a case of heredity — like I was reading about in last night’s paper. When you were left to make faces at fortune, with four troublesome youngsters pulling at your skirts, you might have dropped your mouth-corners and put on a doleful expression — but you did not. You just rolled up your sleeves and put on your thimble and shut your eyes to the old dame’s frowns and went to work. I remember, Motherkin, once when ‘Humpty-Dumpty’ was in the cradle, and I was rocking him to sleep, you sang so loud and so long that I told you I would n’t rock him any more if you did n’t keep still; and you turned on me with such a look! Your eyes were full of tears and your lips were trembling; but yet you were smiling as brave as could be. ‘I dare not stop, darling!’ you said; ‘if I did I should cry!’ I tell you, Motherkin, I never forgot that, and I never will! But what do you see in the ‘posy,’ dear Mother?”

“I see an old-fashioned garden, with an old-



fashioned dame walking in it. An old-fashioned gentleman is bending before her, and presenting her with chrysanthemums — of just this shade. It is early winter — or late, late fall. There is hoar-frost on the dead leaves in the path, hoar-frost upon the hair of these two people, and a touch of winter's cold has nipped their thin cheeks. Yet they smile and are lovingly courteous still. They know that the chrysanthemums will fade; that the hoar-frost will change to ice on which they must slip downwards over the dead-leaf path — out of sight. But they will be brave and beautiful to the end; and their memory will be like the strange and spicy fragrance of their chosen flowers."

"Oh, how pretty, Mother! Call the picture 'Artemisias.' That is the old-time name for 'Mums.' And I hope when it is done some rich, rich person who has leisure to study the meaning of beautiful things will buy your drapery and hang it on a wall alone, close to a cheery wood fire; and that he will sit down before it many times and learn all that you have put into it."

"Belle, next! What says the basket to you, Miss Beauty?"

"I see a big, big ball-room. It is filled with



handsome women and gentlemanly men. They are all, like Bonny's 'rich one,' at leisure and at rest. They say courteous things to one another, and they feel them. The women have never known what it means to wear patched shoes and soiled gloves. They have travelled everywhere. They know everything that happy mortals need to know. They have never heard that there was poverty in the world which they could not relieve, nor suffering they could not soothe. They have never had their tempers spoiled and their faces lined by want of any sort. I am there in the midst of them, as care-free, as beautiful, as soft-spoken as any of them. As happy, too. I wear a lovely gown of just that chrysanthemum shade, but no jewels. I have the blossoms in my hair, on my corsage, in my hands. I love them. I am wholly, wholly content. I have nothing left to wish for."

"Happy mortal! Come, 'Laureate'! But cut it short. Because, you know, my poet, you are inclined to be a little long-drawn-out sometimes."

"Hush! impious spirit! Fright not the muse away!" retorted Roland, in a very unpoetic tone. "I am in Japan. There are lovely fountains, perfect gardens, beautiful maidens — and lots of



time! I don't get up in the morning till I choose. I write soap or even stove-polish poems, unrebuked by my irreverent sister. I have plenty of money to buy my mother gowns covered with embroidery which she does n't have to do herself, and to fill the cupboard with food which she does n't have to cook. There are wonderful kites which Bonny does not make, but which 'Humpty-Dumpty' does fly, from the top of a funny little house as tall as a table, into a blue sky which rests on the top of his head — ”

“Enough! Now, Bob?”

“Oh! I dunno. No school, fer one thing. No grammar talk when I get home. Plenty of fire-crackers an' pistols an' guns an' turkey an' everything I want! Say, Bonny Beckwith! Ain't we never a going to have any supper?”

“At once, small sir. It is a matter of economy to feed you immediately you feel the need of being fed. The longer the delay the greater the cavity. Now, dreamers, all move back, please. Your humble servant has the floor, and must have the table, seeing that it is the only one the house of Beckwith possesses.”

With a smile they all pushed back; but the gentle widow laid her hand caressingly upon Beatrice's shoulder with the question: “Had the



chrysanthemums no visions for your eyes, sweetheart?"

"Heaps of 'em, Motherkin! But some other time."

"No fair, no fair, Bon! What do you want?"

"A home in the country!"

"Whew! I reckon I'll get my Japanese tour first!" said Roland, as he placed the basket of flowers upon the top of the sewing-machine amid a pile of unmended stockings. "Gracious! How much depends upon surroundings! That is n't half as suggestive up there!"

"Hark! What's that row in the street? Hear that awful thumping!" cried Bob, seizing his hat and bounding down the stairs, two steps at a time.

Bonny also hurried to the window, but turned from it in instant dismay.

"For the goodness' sake! It's my old gentleman, and a policeman has him by the collar!" And before anybody could interpose she had followed her small brother.



## CHAPTER III.

### A CHRYSANTHEMUM DINNER.

A SECOND time in one day was Bonny Beckwith destined to come to the rescue of the unfortunate Mr. Brook; for she laid her hand appealingly upon the policeman's sleeve and cried: "Oh, sir! What are you doing? This gentleman is all right!"

The bright-faced girl was no stranger to the officer, who probably knew all the residents of his "beat," and he asked, in surprise: "Why, do you know him, Miss?"

"Certainly. He is a friend of ours."

"Then you'd better give him some lessons in conducting himself on the street; that's all." With this the roundsman loosened his hold of his victim, and flourished his hand to disperse the crowd of urchins and sight-seers who had gathered on the spot.

"What did he do?"

"Thumped on the door of —— as if he were trying to break it in. Why didn't he ring if he wanted to, instead of creating a disturbance?"



“Were you looking for us, Mr. Brook?”

“Of course I was. And I should like to know how in the world you get into these houses. There is no bell, and the door-knob won't turn, and I'd stood here as long as I dared with the wind blowing forty miles an hour. I sent cabby off to walk his horses up and down, and he's disappeared entirely. I left my man at the hotel, in bed with the rheumatism; and — if there's any way of getting into this prison and if you really live here, I should like to be admitted.”

“Certainly. Beg pardon for keeping you so long. See — this is the way. Touch one of those little knobs, the one opposite the card with ‘Beckwith’ on it and the door will open almost immediately. Electric bells, you know.”

“Unluckily, I didn't know! I hate these new-fangled ‘conveniences’ that are ten times as much trouble as old-fashioned things. I'm not quite a fool, my dear, though I may have been presented to you in that light on both occasions of our meeting. I simply did not know how to get in; but I concluded that if I made noise enough somebody would hear and answer,” said Mr. Brook, smiling merrily, now that the door had opened noiselessly, as if by spirit hands, and a hallway with orthodox stairs was revealed.



“And somebody did!” returned Bonny, quite as gayly; while Robert, who had slipped up and thrown his arm about his sister’s waist, laughed outright.

“Humph! Who are you, sir? You were one of the boys who jeered the loudest, if I’m not mistaken,” said the visitor, turning with a savage frown toward the lad.

“I’m her brother.”

“Yes. My brother Robert. He is n’t as bad as he looks, Mr. Brook. Perhaps you would better wait a moment and get your breath. It is pretty high up — on the fifth floor.”

“Good gracious! Is this one of those ‘flat’ houses I hear about?”

“Yes.”

“Some of the finest old houses in the city stood here a quarter of a century ago. It is a shame, a perfect shame.”

“Yes, I suppose so. There are some beautiful residences still left in the neighborhood, and we often look at them and try to imagine the lives that used to be lived in them. But a fifth-story flat is all we can afford, so you must prepare yourself for a plain little place.”

They had ascended as far as the fourth floor, and Mr. Brook had paused on each landing to



regain his wind ; but Bob, at a nod from Beatrice, had sped upwards to announce the coming of the guest.

“ Ah ! plainness does not disturb me, my dear ; and you are a little gentlewoman, no matter where you live. I hope I have not chosen an inopportune hour for my call.”

“ You have given us all a great, great pleasure by your beautiful gift which came this afternoon ; and we are glad to have you come and receive our thanks, whenever it suits you best.” Bonny did not add, as she might, that if he had deferred the call for one hour longer their simple dinner might have been gotten out of the way, and the home made ready for his reception.

The first thing that greeted the old gentleman's eyes as he entered the room, which was dining-room and parlor in one for the Beckwiths, was his own basket of chrysanthemums replaced upon the snowy cloth in the centre of the table, with the soft glow of a shaded lamp falling upon it. If Mrs. Beckwith had arranged this with a view to blinding stranger eyes to the bareness of the room otherwise, her ruse succeeded, for Mr. Brook gazed upon the flowers and for a space saw nothing more.

“ My mother, Mr. Brook,” said Bonny, bring-



ing forward the one really strong chair which the room afforded.

“Your humble servant, madam. I consider myself honored in making your acquaintance. You are the mother of a most charming daughter. Daughters, I should say;” for at that instant Isabelle moved gracefully forward, with a friendliness meant to drive any awkward memories from the guest’s mind, and extended her slim hand in greeting.

At which “Humpty-Dumpty,” from a point behind Mr. Brook’s back, contorted his freckled face and rolled his black eyes so horribly that Bonny was forced to smile.

“We have much to thank you for, and must consider that a fortunate accident which resulted in our receiving so delightful a gift,” answered the hostess, placing herself near her visitor, “unless your fall of this afternoon resulted in some injury to yourself. I hope it did not.”

“No, oh! no. That is, nothing to mention. A few bruises and scratches, and a bit of stiffness. But I thank you. I should not have been alone, only Dolloway, my man, has the rheumatism and I couldn’t think of taking him out in the cold. He stayed at the hotel. If he had been



with me he would have prevented my making an exhibition of myself. However, 'all's well that ends well;' and I have been congratulating myself ever since that I may have been thus led to trace an old friend. Did you ever hear of one Conrad Honeychurch Beckwith?"

A responsive smile illumined the widow's pale face, and the last misgiving she had about thus receiving a stranger into her home vanished. "There could be but one Conrad Honeychurch Beckwith, I think. Such was the name of my husband's father."

"I thought so! I thought so! Your husband is — was —"

"Charles Honeychurch Beckwith. The only son of Conrad who grew to manhood."

"Madam, your hand again! We are old, old friends! Or we should be. Conrad was the chum of my youth, the Damon to my Pythias. We even went 'Forty-Nining' together; but he soon left California and returned to his dying wife in New York. I stayed — awhile. He wrote me a few times, then ceased to even answer my letters, which after a while I ceased to write. From that day to this I have never heard of him. I have hunted Beckwiths without number, till people have thought me Beckwith mad; but my



Conrad was never among them, and I had given him up. How strange, how strange, and also how fortunate, that I stood gaping at the sights till I was knocked down and Conrad's grandchild was sent to pick me up! Come here, my dear! Come here and let me look at you!"

Mr. Brook's excitement communicated itself to all the household, always alert to anything which varied the monotony of their pinched lives. Roland came forward and gazed wonderingly upon the man who, fast slipping out of life, yet remembered so faithfully the friend of his youth. Belle felt the elation of a real romance; Bonny was dancing with delight; and Robert, the "terrible," was eagerly speculating whether this was the sort of an old gentleman one read of in story-books, duly appreciative of small attentions and liberal as to tips.

But the mother understood best the desire of the old man's heart to learn all there was to tell, and set herself to gratify it. "My dears, suppose you go on with the dinner-getting. I am sure Mr. Brook will pardon our necessity, and I hope will share our meal. You see, we are rather cramped for room; so, while table is being made ready, those of us not engaged in the task generally retreat to this corner and call it the



‘withdrawing room.’ But maybe you know the inconveniences of a small city flat?”

“No, indeed. Thank the Lord, I live in the country. Even in my best days I would get out of town nearly every night to sleep at home; though I was a beau here, when I first came back from the coast with my pockets full of nuggets. I used purposely to have my name in the papers as often as might be, hoping that thus, if I could not find Conrad, he would find me. But it was of no use. Five-and-twenty years ago I left the town for good. I never meant to come back. But of late a terrible uneasiness has possessed me, and I finally yielded to it. I understand what it meant now.”

They had moved to the corner which Mrs. Beckwith had designated, and though the guest appeared to notice nothing of what the young folks were doing, he was, nevertheless, very watchful; and while his hostess related all the simple history of two discouraged men, her husband and his father, yielding to a fate which seemed too hard for them and dying, each in his prime, — ay, even before what most would call the prime, — the wise old visitor read between her periods the tale of her own bravery, and wondered how best he could second her efforts.



“And that is all. I am sorry we have not better entertainment to offer, but such as we have I see is ready.”

The widow rose as she spoke, and it was not many paces Mr. Brook need follow her before he reached the table.

With a commendable view to eking out a short supply, Bonny had placed the basket of flowers again upon the board, though she had had to substitute a coarse tablecloth for the daintily embroidered fabric which was intended for a richer household; and, at the first glance, the guest almost believed that the posies were to be their only repast.

However, this was not the case. There were roasted potatoes, bread, butter, and a fragrant cup of tea; the last a luxury, and the one addition which had been made to the regular fare. Now tea was an abomination to the palate of Philipse Chidly Brook, and potatoes he never ate, when he could help himself; but this being an occasion when he evidently could not, he put a brave face on the matter, and accepted them as if they were the rarest of delicacies. Suddenly he looked up from his plate, and beheld the dark eyes of Robert fixed upon him with critical attention.

“Well, my lad! Out with it! A penny for your thoughts.”



For once the graceless boy was scared. The prospect of possible tips depended upon his present behavior, and he choked back the remark that had almost escaped his lips. "I — I haven't any. I — I mean — I dassent tell 'em."

"Not for the penny?"

"No, sir, not fer a nickel."

"You need n't. I can guess them. In any case I never go above the traditional price of thoughts."

"I bet — you can't guess 'em!"

"How much will you bet?"

"Robert!" remonstrated Mrs. Beckwith, while Belle began "talking eyes" at her most rapid rate, certain that the boy was about to disgrace them all.

"I'll bet all I've got. Two cents ag'in two of yourn, if you say so."

"Mr. Brook, our little brother attends the primary department of a highly esteemed parish school. Hence the elegant language which you must have observed," remarked Bonny, hoping to divert attention from the subject of "thoughts" to education.

"He is well enough. For a boy. He looks like you."

"Motherkin says I behave like her, too," as-



served Bob, triumphantly; and Beatrice felt her effort worse than wasted.

“H’m-m. You were wondering how old I am. Was n’t it so?”

“Ginger! How did you know?”

“I was a boy once.”

“What did you use to do? Did you play marbles? Er fight?”

“I played marbles and I flew kites. When I could get any money to buy them with, or coax my mother to make them. And I used to drive the cows when I visited my uncle, on his farm, not far from here. It may be that I have trotted barefooted over the very spot on which this house now stands. Seventy years ago, that was; seventy years ago! Then I was a child like you.”

“My gracious! An’ you’re alive yet!”

“Not only that — I am happy yet! Doubly happy now that I have found somebody who may become like a little grandson to me; for I have none of my own.”

“Why have n’t you?”

“Probably because I never had a wife. I would like to ‘adopt’ my Conrad’s grandson, in a way, if he will let me.”

“Who’s him?”

“Yourself.”



“Pooh! You wouldn’t want me, I guess. An’ I know ’bout ’doptingness. They was a woman in this house, she ’dopted a baby, an’ it squalled. Nen she got tired of it. Nen she wanted to give it back an’ the folks wouldn’t take it. Nen she put it in the Norphan ’Sylum. An’ it’s there yet. I’m too big, anyway. I’m going on nine. Ain’t I, Mother? When will I be as old as nine?”

“Next Fourth of July, dear. You certainly are too old for adoption, as you mean it. But if Mr. Brook has n’t any odd, small people to make him both glad and sorry, all in a minute, you might supply the deficiency.”

“H’m-m. I guess I’d better not. I ain’t very good. I don’t have time to be.”

“Indeed? What keeps you busy?” asked the amused old gentleman.

“Folks. An’ fun. Bonny ’most wears me out, some days. She sends me to do things. I sell papers; an’ I hold horses, when I can get ’em to hold. Some men say I ain’t big ’nough, an’ I think that’s mean. I’m as big as I can be, ain’t I?”

“Quite!” answered the unwise Beatrice, who did her daily best to spoil the child by alternate teasings and pettings.



“Nen I get mad. Nen Motherkin’s heart acts up. An’ they is a gen’ral miscomfort in the house, so I go outdoors. I learn bad words outdoors, an’ I come home an’ say ’em, an’ get ’proved. But we get along. Hello, Motherkin! What’s the matter? Ginger! There she goes ag’in! It’s one of her sick times, I s’pose! Oh! Mother! You’re dead — you’re dead!”

Unobserved by all but her small son, Mrs. Beckwith had fallen gently forward till her colorless face rested upon the basket of chrysanthemums, and the guest thought the boy had spoken the sorrowful truth.



## CHAPTER IV.

### A GENEROUS CONSPIRACY.

“DON’T, Robert! Remember, it is best to be quiet!” said Isabelle, with an admirable self-control which not only gave Mr. Brook a new idea of her character, but the knowledge that this could not be the first time such a trouble had befallen the household.

And, a moment later, Beatrice had taken time to whisper in the little fellow’s ear: “It is no worse than usual, darling. Mother is reviving.”

Then the child heard a trembling question, eager and low: “Has she ever been like this before? Is it my visit that has caused it?” and looking up through his fingers he saw the disturbed face of their guest bent close above him.

“Yes. No. ’Tain’t your visit. She’s this way often. But she always looks like dead, an’ the doctor-man says she will die if she don’t stop sewin’ an’ live outdoors. But she can’t let the sewin’ go, ’cause we have to eat an’ wear clothes. We don’t eat any more ’n we can help, but we’re



always hungry. We try not to be, but we are. So she has to 'broider the things an' sell 'em, you see."

The two were quite alone then in the little parlor, for Roland had, at the first instant, lifted his mother in his arms and carried her into the small bedroom which was her own, and had stationed himself beside her to chafe her face and hands and administer the medicine which Isabelle had promptly prepared. They were evidently accustomed to such emergencies; but Bonny had disappeared in pursuit of a doctor, though she knew this action to be against her mother's wish, expressed in view of such an event as this.

"But how can I help it!" argued the girl, dashing down the long flights of stairs two steps at a time. "How can I see her suffer so and not try to get somebody who knows more than we do to relieve her! Even though it will take her many hours of hard labor to pay for the physician's visit."

Meanwhile Robert led Mr. Brook into the corner, dignified by the name of "withdrawing room," and the old gentleman laid his hand affectionately upon the boy's shoulder. "My dear, I would like to help you all, if I can. I do not wish to



ask you anything which your mother would not be willing you should answer; but anything that you can tell me about your affairs, anything which your conscience does not warn you had best be kept to yourself, I wish you would tell me. Remember I was the friend of your grandfather, and try to feel as if you were talking to him."

This speech was better suited to the ears of the elder son than to those of "Humpty-Dumpty," and in the first case would have been answered judiciously; but judgment and reticence were qualities unknown to this small boy, and he now made as clean a breast of family matters as he was capable of doing. If there was anything he did not tell, it was something he had forgotten.

Mr. Brook listened with sympathy and some compunction; and as soon as the physician whom Beatrice had summoned pronounced Mrs. Beckwith "out of danger for the present," took his leave, hunted up the long-suffering cab-driver who had brought him thither, and returned to his hotel.

There he burst rather excitedly into his own apartments, with the exclamation "I've found them, Dolloway! The Beckwiths, at last!"

"You don't say so!" returned the other old fellow, who had left his bed for a cushioned chair



close to a grate fire, and who had the name of being Mr. Brook's servant, but was, at times, his master — through rheumatism, which mastered both.

“But I have. That must be what my anxiety to see the horse show meant. Else why, after all these years, should I have been suddenly rendered too uneasy to abide at home, and must needs not only put myself out but you as well? How goes it, Dolloway?”

“Bad, sir; about as bad as it can be. But a body must expect that who goes a trapesing off after will-o'-wisps, at our time of life, leaving good, respectable feather beds to sleep on boards in a barn of a place like this.”

“Not boards, Dolloway. The best mattresses the city affords, the manager assures me; and comfortable enough to those who like them. Yes, yes, yes. In some ways it is a pity. Yet — it is the most fortunate thing. Had any supper, Dolloway?”

“Don't want any, sir. Thank you.”

“Pooh! I do. They had what they called supper, I suppose, poor things! And I'm ashamed to mention it; only I feel hungrier than if I hadn't eaten anything; so, since you have not, take a cup of coffee with me, man, and



lay aside formality for once. What will we have besides the coffee, Dolloway?"

"I could n't eat a bite, sir."

"But you'd not refuse to please your old master, would you, lad? When we have taken all this trouble we want to make our holiday seem a bit like old times. Eh? In the old days, Dolloway, you could out-eat and out-drink me. Yes, yes, you could, indeed! What shall it be?"

"Well, if I must I must, and I'm obliged to you, sir, though I only do it to please you. I heard one of the waiters saying there was a lot of nice venison come in from the West, sir. If it were not spoiled in the cooking a venison steak — done to a turn, sir, done to a turn, as you like it yourself, Mr. Brook — might relish a little. Eh?"

"The very thing, lad, the very thing! I will ring and order it immediately." Without waiting to be served by his servant, who remained composedly in his arm-chair, Mr. Brook pulled the rope, which he preferred to any modern "button" for bell-ringing purposes, and gave an order for a meal that would have made the Beck-with family's eyes open in astonishment.

"A fine thing to have such an appetite as ours,



Dolloway, at our age ! A very fine thing, indeed. Eighty I shall be on my next birthday, and you but two years younger. And I warrant me there are no two other old chaps in this town who will sit down to this kind of a dinner with the relish we will. Eh ? That's the best of using gifts and not abusing them. And my waist measures no more than it did in my youth, lad ; which shows I have not been a gourmand, though the truth is I like good living. I like good living immensely. I would like to tell you what a pretty family of five had prepared. Potatoes ! nothing but potatoes, except, of course, the inevitable bread and butter and the detestable tea. I don't wonder the woman had heart-failure, poor thing ! And the air of that 'flat' — it was enough to stifle a body. After our air at home, man."

"Humph ! Then I suppose I am not to know anything about Mr. Conrad's folks, save what you choose to tell me in dribblets, sir," remarked Dolloway, in the injured tone of one suffering ungratified curiosity.

"You shall know all that I do myself, old fellow ; but let us take it over our dinner. I want your advice, too. I am sorry to say that Conrad left his people poorly off."



“Mr. Beckwith is dead, then, sir?”

“Dead this forty years, lad. Dead for forty years — that boy!” And Mr. Brook sank into a chair opposite his companion, and at the same time into a reverie so deep that even the highly privileged Dolloway dared not interrupt the current of his master’s thought.

Small Robert was in bed and should have been asleep; but Beatrice, listening, heard a forlorn little yawn and knew that the excitement of the evening or the tea-and-chrysanthemum dinner had been too much for his nerves. This suited her exactly; and watching her chance she stole into the room, or bed closet, known as “the boys’,” and perched herself on the pillow where Roland’s head would repose somewhat later.

“Hello, Bob! Asleep?”

“You know I ain’t. What’s up?”

“I am. I’ve something to say to you.”

“I hain’t done nothin’. What have I done?”

“Nothing but goodness, small sir. Bonny does n’t scold, does she?”

“Sometimes,” answered the truthful child.

“Well, she is n’t going to now. She wants your assistance.”

“I’m goin’ ter sleep.”

“Pooh! I don’t want you to do anything to-



night. I want to consult with you. Bob, are you awake?"

"If it ain't nothin' ter bother a feller at night, I be."

"Sit up in bed. Here, put my jacket around you. I've a scheme — a splendid scheme!"

"Don't like your schemes. Last one did n't turn out worth a snap."

"This one will. I see how you and I can make some money. Sit up."

"I am sitting up. How can we make it?" asked the cash-greedy child, interested at last.

"You know those chrysanthemums?"

"Yep."

"Well; here, let me whisper. We — can — sell — them! And make a lot of dollars — maybe. Make something, anyway. Enough to pay for the doctor's visit."

"Beatrice Beckwith! They was give to you!"

"Don't speak so loud. Mother is asleep, Roland is writing, Belle studying. Only you and I are to know about this. Yes, I know they were given to me. To *me*, understand. That is why I dare do this thing. And don't reproach me for parting with them. It breaks my heart to do it; only it don't break it into such little bits as it gets broken into every time I think of



Motherkin and how hard she works. To come to the point. I want you to get up with me early to-morrow and go on the street and try to sell the flowers. Will you?"

"Gracious! Would you — *you* yourself?"

"I would — I myself. I would do anything rather than be so idle. The flowers are mine. We have all enjoyed them. They did us good that way; now I want to make them do us good some other way."

"Humph! How much will you give me fer my share?"

"Mercenary little wretch! not a cent! I want every single cent for Motherkin. You would n't take anything away from Motherkin, would you, Bob?"

"Not that way. I would n't no quicker 'n you would. But if I had a little 'capital' I could sell papers like the other kids do on Fourteenth Street an' round."

"Robert, you are not a 'kid.' You are a well-born boy. I thought you did sell papers, anyway, almost every day."

"Fer the other fellers, that's all. I don't make my livin'. If I had enough I could make a pile."

"Well, we'll see. But those chrysanthemums.



Think of the value. Forty times seventy-five cents! Forty times porterhouse steaks all round the family. About one hundred and twenty tip-top oyster stews. Potatoes, galore. Bread — bread enough to pave the street from here to Union Square. And six weeks' rent. Think of it, 'Humpty-Dumpty,' and cease to wonder that I can hardly wait till daylight to set about the business. Will you help me?"

"Yep, if Mother 'll let me."

"You blessed little stupid! Mother is not to know a word about it, till it is past forbidding. Else she has such peculiar ideas about politeness that she might stop us. If you do as I want, as well as you can, I'll give you all you can make out of the best flower in the lot."

"It's a bargain. What time 'ill I start?"

"Not till after breakfast. Not till you go to school. Then, instead of going to school, go with me up on Twenty-third Street, and there we'll seek our fortune. Stay! I've a splendid thought now! We'll go to the very store where they were bought and sell them back. They, the store folks at least, would know the value. Then we wouldn't either of us have to stay away from school, and we could meet somewhere on the way home and come in together, with flying colors.



So, if Mother was n't especially pleased at first, we could brace each other up in coaxing her round to look at the matter as we do and eating one of her chrysanthemums turned into oysters for her dinner that very day."

"H'm-m. But — Wull."

"Wull me no wulls, my son!"

"Motherkin don't coax worth a snap. An' what if she should be 'grieved'? I wouldn't mind her talking, so much; but when she sits round an' don't say anything, only look solemn, it — it — breaks me all up."

"That isn't a nice expression for a nice little boy. Say 'it disturbs me; that is more elegant.'"

"Who cares for el'gunce! I hate them times when lumps come in throats. I've had 'em. I'd ruther be whipped, like other kids is; I would, so!"

"Look here, Robert Beckwith. I *can* do this thing all by myself. I don't need to ask you or anybody to help me, but I thought you'd like to do something nice for Motherkin. If you don't like to it's all right;" and Bonny rose to go, with that independent air which experience had taught her would invariably bring her small brother to terms.



“Hello! Who ’s a not wantin’ ter? But — if —”

“If trouble comes I ’ll take all the blame, as I should, for it belongs to me. And I ’m glad Mother is in bed now, so I can take the basket out of the room without anybody asking questions. Good-night. Not a word, now, to Roland when he comes in!”

“H’m-m. You might know I ain’t a blabber, anyway!”

“Of course you’re not. I depend on you. Good-night.”

Beatrice passed into the parlor and lifted her treasure from the table, then turned to leave as quietly as she had entered.

“Where are you going with those, Bonny?” asked Isabelle, drowsily; and her sister started as if she had been guilty of wrong-doing.

“I think they will keep better if I take them out of the basket and put them in a pail of water,” replied Bonny, hastily.

“I suppose they would. But it seems a pity to disturb such a perfect arrangement, and I do not think they would wither even that way very soon. They last well.”

“I am glad of that. I would not have them wither for anything!” replied the innocent con-



spirator, feeling as if she wanted to bury her face in the flowers and cry; only she reflected that salt water was supposed to be injurious to delicate petals and refrained. But when she went to bed that night she had taken each chrysanthemum carefully from its mossy nest and, after clipping its stem slightly, plunged it into a pail of fresh water and placed it in the coolest place the house afforded.



## CHAPTER V.

### IN OLD TRINITY.

“ FLOWERS? Flowers? Chrysanthemums?  
Any, madam?”

“How much?”

“Seventy-five cents apiece.”

“Girl, you must be crazy! I’ll give you ten.”

Beatrice turned on her heel with all her native dignity and some that she had prepared for this especial occasion; having confided her intention to the newspaper-woman on the corner, who also occasionally sold flowers, and received the advice to “not be beat down by nobody. Some is ladies an’ some is trash, what goes a shopping on th’ Aveny, an’ you jest hold on patient, — the right one’ll come along an’ take the hull lot, mebbe. Some woman ’at’s goin’ ter give a party er sunthin’ is the most like ter buy; er young gells. Young gells is good customers, if they happen ter have any money. Good luck go with you, honey; an’ I don’t want ter see you bringin’ home a single posy!”



With this good-speed sounding pleasantly in her unaccustomed ears, the novice at flower selling set her face westward with her basket on her arm and her small brother presumably following her; though, as he was sometimes in sight but oftener not, she had doubts on the subject.

“Anyway I only wanted him for company. It seems so — so sort of dreadful to do this. I tremble every time I open my mouth, and I am afraid I shall not sell a single blossom, except at the flower-shop. I hate to go there, though! It seems so mean to sell things that have been given you, and when you can have no chance to explain, though, of course, I would n’t explain anyway. Robert!”

“Hi! Here am I!”

“Why can’t you walk along beside me respectably? Eh?”

“Wull, wull — why, Bon! what makes you look that way?”

“What way?”

“Just as if you was a goin’ ter cry.”

“I don’t. I’m not. I — I hate it!”

“What makes you, then?”

“I hate other things worse, like Mother’s pale face over her work. I don’t mean I hate, but — Oh! I thought it would be easy, last night when



we talked it over, and it is n't. I expect every minute to meet some of the 'Conservatory girls,' then I should about die of mortification."

"Well, I'm beat! If girls ain't the queerest things! A wantin' ter do things an' not a wantin' ter at the same time. Here, give me a bunch. I'll show you. This is the way! Flowers! *Flowers!* Here they go! Nicest an' puttiest chrysms in the city! Cheap at seventy-five cents! Only one place in town where a feller can get 'em! Here, young feller! Don't you want a button-holer?"

"Too dear!" replied the good-natured clerk whom Robert had intercepted on his way down town.

"H'm-m. You don't seem to succeed any better than I do, Bob. Chrysanthemums! The rarest shade in the city!"

The two amateur flower-sellers had soon traversed all the distance between their home and the very corner where their stock had been purchased, and yet not one blossom had been exchanged for the desired cash that was to buy the oyster dinner. When they came to the place where Bonny had met Mr. Brook she paused, undecided whether to cross into the next block or to take her stand there; but was finally decided to do the latter by



the fact that a well-dressed woman had paused to examine the cluster of flowers and to admire them. She would even have bought one apparently, but as she opened her purse, Bonny gently mentioned the price, and the purse was closed with a snap.

“Sev-en-ty-five-cents ! I think you must be new to the business, or you would never ask such an absurd amount as that ! H’m-m. Seventy-five cents for one chrysanthemum !” And the woman with the plethoric pocket-book had passed on.

“I’m going into the store. I can’t bear this !” cried poor Beatrice, feeling utterly discouraged as her bright castle in the air fell tumbling in ruins. “They will take them, anyway, I’m sure. The clerk said yesterday to a customer that he could not supply the demand for blossoms of this shade. Come on, Bob ! The worst he can do is stare a little, and it’s none of his business, certainly.” Thus swallowing her pride, which she felt was silly enough, Beatrice led the way into the shop which she had visited in Mr. Brook’s company the day before.

Robert followed, whistling gayly. Anything which kept him from school was matter of rejoicing to him, and though he realized that they were having very hard luck he felt no more shame



in selling posies than newspapers; but his hilarity was suddenly checked by the dandified salesman calling out sharply: "Out of here, boy! We can't have any boys in here!"

"I should like ter know why not? What yer givin' us?" demanded Bonny's "darling," with all the roughness and assurance of a regular street gamin.

"Hush, dear! Here, let me take yours, too. You just step outside and wait for me till I come. I won't be a minute now," whispered the sister, persuasively.

But "Humpty-Dumpty's" blood was up. What were stores for if not for people to enter? How did that unmannerly clerk know but that he, Robert, wanted to buy out all the stock piled upon those loaded counters? He'd show him! One man was as good as another, in this world.

"No, I won't wait, neither. I'm a goin' where you go, an' I'm goin' ter stay as long as I like. Say, boss! How much fer them roses, yonder?"

"Clear out of here, you impudent little scalliwag! You wish to buy no roses."

"No. But I wish to sell some chrysanthemums, sir," interposed Beatrice, gently. "These flowers were purchased here yesterday. I should like to resell them to you."



The dapper young man who had glanced admiringly at the pretty girl on the occasion of her previous visit, under Mr. Brook's escort, now stared at her superciliously. "Bought here? Ah! Well, we never take second-hand goods, you know. And flowers are an article that could not be handled a second time, even if we did. Is that all?"

"But, sir, you told a lady, yesterday, that you could not supply the demand for this color. I have kept these very carefully. See? They are not withered in the least."

"Impossible, Miss. If that boy belongs to you, you had better take him outside before he gets into any further mischief. He has knocked down a pile of baskets already, and if he damages —"

Poor Bonny did not wait to hear the conclusion of the matter. With a desperate fear at her heart that her small and independent brother would be the cause of some dreadful trouble, she seized him firmly by the collar and forced him before her out of the shop.

The door closed behind them with the dull thud which baize-muffled doors give, and it seemed to her sounded the knell of her "flowery hopes," as she herself grimly expressed it.

"Well, I say, Bon! I did think you had some



snap! What'd a feller do if he had n't no more grit'n a girl, I'd like to know? Here, come on, I'll show you. Let's go over to the hotel there. That's the Fifth Avenue, where rich folks stays. I've sold papers for Jeemsy there, sometimes. They's a decent crowd goes in an' out. Mebbe they ain't all so horrid stingy as they 'pear ter be on this side. But, Bon! We'll have ter come down on the price. They ain't nobody, 'less he's jest another such old man as Mr. Brook, goin' ter pay such a pile as that fer posies — second-hand ones, too."

"Robert, where did you get all this wisdom, and you but eight?"

"Oh! I've been around," said Robert, with an inimitable little swagger, which brought a fleeting smile to Beatrice's face.

"All right. Let's try the hotel, that is, if the people will let us. I think I have heard that the curbstone merchants — as we are now, dear — have each a self-appropriated place with which he allows nobody else to interfere. We may get upon somebody's 'stand,' but if we do, from our morning's experience, I don't fear but we shall be so informed."

They did take their places opposite the entrance to the hotel, and so respectable and quiet-looking



were they that nobody molested them ; and as they were the only flower-sellers upon that corner they did after a while exchange some of their wares for cash ; but it was, as Robert had advised, at a great reduction, and Beatrice was heartily discouraged. Worse than that, a feeling of regret that she had undertaken this thing without her mother's knowledge and consent began to trouble her as it had not done while the first enthusiasm of unselfishness lasted.

“ I wish — I wish I had not slipped out of the house, as if I were doing something wrong ! ” murmured the girl, half aloud.

“ Hey ? ” asked Robert. “ Ain't it getting cold ? Ginger ! My toes is 'most froze. This ain't half the fun newspapers is. A feller can keep warm that way. He can jump on street cars, and off when the conductor catches him. Let's go home ! ”

“ You go, dear, if you are cold. I am not. That is I — I — No, I will not give up beaten this way. I will sell these flowers if — ”

“ You can ! ” interjected Robert, just in time to prevent Bonny's making a very rash vow.

She substituted a rather forced laugh for the vow, and again urged her brother to go and leave her. “ There is no need for us both to be miser-



able. Besides, if you should take cold I should never forgive myself. Do go; there's a dear, and I am ever and ever so grateful to you for what you have already done."

"No, sir-ee. I guess I've got grit if you haven't. But if you don't mind I'll just run around the block ter start my toes up, an' I'll be back so's you can run, too."

Off bounded the child, and, small as he was, Beatrice felt no fear that he would be lost even in a neighborhood of which he knew so little; but as she watched him out of sight, a voice spoke in her ear.

"What lovely, lovely chrysanthemums! Are they for sale, miss?"

"H'm-m. She does n't think I look like a regular flower-girl," thought Bonny, complacently, and answered promptly: "Yes, madam. They are, as you have noticed, a very peculiar shade." Then she raised her eyes, and met — those of the richest girl in her class at the Conservatory, the very one who was to sing with her at the next reception.

"Goodness! Miss Beckwith! Beg pardon! I did not notice. I thought it was a flower-girl standing here."

Beatrice gasped, tried to smile, felt her face



flame, and her courage — or temper, she didn't know which — rise at the same time. "There is no mistake, Miss Agnew. I *am*, temporarily, a flower-girl. These chrysanthemums *are* for sale. But I have had rather bad luck. They prove to be a more expensive sort than most passers-by care for."

Miss Agnew's own color rose a little. She was a gentle, high-bred girl, and she saw at once that there was something out of the common in her classmate's action. If the flowers had cost all there was in her purse, she would have taken some of them then. "Indeed? I have never seen any like them, except at the show last week. How much are they?"

"They cost seventy-five cents each, yesterday, and I was told they were prize flowers. They are — anything I can get for them — now!"

"Oh! I don't call that high! I often have to pay a dollar or more for roses at holiday time. Of the sort I like. I think these would just suit Mamma. I will take a dozen, please. I was sorry you were not at class to-day. The Professor went over our duet with me, and I gathered some new ideas from him. He is very anxious it should be a success; and naturally I am. Will you be there next lesson?"



“Yes, I think so. At least, I shall not be absent for the same reason as to-day,” said Beatrice, with a return of something like her natural manner.

“That’s good! I can sing so much better with you than with anybody else,” remarked Miss Agnew, smiling pleasantly, nodding cordially, and passing onward immediately.

“Well! I’m in for it now! If Helen Agnew is inclined to tell, the whole class can ‘point the finger of scorn’ at me to-morrow. But how cold it is! How warm *she* looked! She had evidently been having luncheon at this great hotel, for she came out, or rather she walked along with a ‘rocky’-looking old gentleman, using a toothpick. I suppose he was her father. How nice it must be to have a father! And think of being able, a school-girl, out of one’s own pocket money, to buy a dozen chrysanthemums for one’s mother — at such a price! Yet, after all, selling them for one’s mother may be just as noble. I’ll ‘play pretend’ it is, any way. And I am quite refreshed. I’ll ‘buckle tae’ with a good will now! There are only twenty-five left; and —”

Beatrice fell to ruminating. She forgot that she was on a street corner, presumably to sell



flowers. She paid no attention to the rude pushes and jostles that she received, but swayed this way and that, accommodating her slight person to the needs of the crowd, till one more urgent pedestrian than the others suddenly caught the handle of his walking-stick in that of her basket and ruthlessly tore it from her grasp.

Beatrice aroused herself with a scream. "My flowers! Oh, my flowers! Please, please, don't tread upon them, people! Please give me time to —"

"Eh! Bon, what's the matter? Who took 'em? This chap?" demanded Robert, who had returned, and eagerly catching hold of the wrong person. "Look a here, man! You'd better look out how you steal my sister's chrysms! I'll let you know I — Ginger! There's the old fellow himself!"

Alas! the inevitable crowd! Nobody can utter a sound above the natural, but dozens of itching ears must pause to learn why.

"Beg pardon, Miss. It was an accident. I am extremely sorry. Are they injured? Ah! I see. Hopelessly. The price, please, I will make good the loss; but I am in a hurry — Yes, Dolloway, directly. Keep close to me, Dolloway. I'll look out for you. Eh? Hey? What?"



Bonny was stooping to gather up her ruined treasure, but something in the voice startled her, a peculiar softness of the *r*'s, and a broad inflection of the *a*'s.

“It is the corner of Fate!” cried the girl, recklessly, and lifted herself face to face with Mr. Chidly Brook.

“Why, Miss Beckwith! It is, indeed!”



## CHAPTER VI.

“HUMPTY-DUMPTY’S” NOVEL EXPERIENCE.

“O H, sir! Will you ever forgive me?”  
“Forgive you, my dear! I am the one to be forgiven, I should think. And I appreciate your wearing my gift, and am exceedingly sorry I ruined the flowers. However, they can easily be replaced. Odd that we should meet just here again! Were you returning from your school? And how is your mother to-day?”

“Mother is better, thank you, though I have not seen her since early morning. But I am not returning from school, and I was not wearing your flowers. I cannot let you think anything so kind of me as that. I was selling them!”

The four people of the group had retreated to the wall of the hotel, aside from the passing throng, and Mr. Dolloway had been eying Robert, who returned the stare, very much as a big dog eyes a little one before making acquaintance. If there was one object in the world of the old fellow’s special detestation, it was the average small boy. He was always ready to ascribe to



them all the sins of the decalogue with many original additions; and he now suspected the little brother of Beatrice of having caused Mr. Brook's detention for some evil purpose of his own. He was not even convinced otherwise when presently his master recovered sufficiently from the astonishment Bonny's words had caused to explain: "These are Conrad Beckwith's grandchildren, Dolloway."

"Humph! How do you do?" asked the old servant, feeling he must say something.

"First-rate!" responded Bob, heartily. "Howdy yourself?"

"H'm-m, I'm well enough, but they's a cold wind blows round this corner, sir."

"Yes, lad, I know it. But did you wish to say anything further to me, Miss Beckwith?" asked the considerate Mr. Brook, trying to make his manner as cordial as it had been, but failing signally.

Beatrice felt desperate. She must make this kind, gentle old man understand that she had not been selling his gift for a mean, selfish reason; yet how was she to do so? It was unkind to keep him standing in that bleak place any longer, nor did she wish to visit any more stores in his company.



“Yes; I do want to tell you about it. I would be glad to talk with you about everything; but where can I? Will you go back to my mother’s house with me? Or where can I go with you?”

“My child, do not distress yourself about these trumpery posies. They were yours. You had a perfect right to do with them as you chose.”

“But I want to explain. I am not so mean as you think me, and yet I am a great deal worse. I played truant to-day, like a bad little boy, and persuaded Robert to do the same. My poor mother knows nothing about this affair, and she will be mortified when she hears. Besides, I would like to ask your advice, somebody’s advice anyway, and you say you were grandfather’s friend. I—”

“Wait a moment, my dear. Have you had your dinner yet?” Mr. Brook glanced from the sister to the brother, as he spoke, and the brightening of Robert’s black eyes was sufficient answer.

“No, sir. But we will get that as soon as we get home.”

“Then I have it! Let us take a carriage down to my hotel, where I am sure of being served as I like, and you two take dinner with me there. Then we can have ample time to talk, as well as



a comfortable place to do it in. Will you? What do you say, Robert?"

"I say yes an' thank you," answered the child promptly, and with more civility than might have been expected.

"I do not like to give you that trouble and — and expense," said Bonny naïvely, alert as poverty had made her to the value of money. "Besides, we should be going home soon."

"If you have played truant for a little while, you may as well continue a bit longer. I am as anxious to talk with you as you can possibly be with me, and I will be responsible to your mother for this added delay; that is, if you are not positively needed at home."

"Thank you. No, I am not needed now. I am not of much account there anyway; and we shall be very happy to accept your invitation," added Bonny, with a sudden change of determination induced by a hasty study of her little brother's face. How hungry he did look! How good a real dinner would taste to the child! Well, if people did n't mean what they said they should be punished by being believed!

Yet Mr. Brook's smile at her acceptance told certainly enough how sincere had been his invitation; and in a few seconds more the whole



party were driving down Broadway, and Robert felt himself of considerable more importance than when he had interviewed pedestrians on the flower question.

“Do you like riding, lad?” asked Mr. Brook, amused at the earnest expression of the boy’s face.

“Like it! You bet! It’s bully!”

Dolloway frowned and sniffed. “Talk English, can’t you?”

“He knows what I mean; so do you,” replied “Humpty-Dumpty” instantly.

“Rob! don’t be impertinent!” cried Beatrice, warningly.

“Ain’t impertinent. I do like it. Bully means tip-top. I don’t mean anything out the way, only it does bother me to talk c’rect. I will when I get older, mebbe.”

“Train up a child in the way —” said Dolloway; but got no further, for Robert’s exclamations effectually stopped all other conversation, even if his elders had been inclined to converse; and pleasant though the ride was, all save the boy were glad when the carriage drew up before the substantial old hostelry where Mr. Brook felt was the only positive comfort to be found in the city.

“This is our parlor, my dear. Is n’t it a good,



old-fashioned room? Our bedrooms open off from it. I have put up at this 'inn' for many years; that is, I used to do so when I was in the habit of spending much of my time in town. Did I mention to you that we return home in the morning?"

"So soon!" exclaimed Beatrice, and wondered why she felt so sorry.

"We have been here for several days. My sister will expect us. Now, my dear, I want you to tell me anything you wish. Rest assured I will advise you to the utmost of my wisdom."

Bonny looked up and saw Mr. Dolloway's eyes fixed curiously upon her. There was not a particle of sympathy in his face and it was evident that girls were not much more to his taste than boys. She felt that she could not say a word before him, and she did not know how to place him, whether as friend or servant of her host.

Perhaps Mr. Brook saw this hesitation and rightly interpreted it; for he rose almost at once and said: "I would like to go down to old Trinity before I return home. I'll leave you, Dolloway, and our young friend Robert to order the dinner, and Miss Beckwith and I will walk down to the church,—that is, if she will favor me with her company. By the time we come



back, dinner will be ready to serve, and I shall be able to satisfy Joanna's questions about her old place of worship. Does that plan suit everybody?"

Bonny sprang up instantly. "I think you have a gift for plans which please everybody, dear sir! I was never in Trinity Church but once, though I was born and have always lived in New York. I should like to go very much."

"Then let us be off. Will the arrangement suit Robert? If not —"

"I'd rather stay here, thank you, sir," said the boy; "and did you mean 'at I could have *anything* I wanted to eat?"

"Bob!"

"Certainly. Order anything you wish, that is in market. I remember how hungry I used to get when I was a school-boy. I'm hungry still; so don't forget to look out for me, too. Good-by for a little while;" and nodding gayly to the lad, Mr. Brook led the way into the street and down it to the church.

"I like this old place. I can remember it for so long. To step into it out of the rush of Broadway is almost like being recreated," said Mr. Brook, reverently, as they entered and passed slowly up the broad aisle.



Bonny could say nothing. Her mind was in a ferment of eagerness to tell this new-old friend everything concerning herself and her dear ones. She felt that he would understand and be able to explain the "muddle" in which she found herself without her saying a word, and yet she wanted to leave nothing for him to guess at.

"Will you sit down here with me, Mr. Brook?"

"Certainly."

They took the places Beatrice had designated, and as she looked up into the kindly, interested face all her trouble passed away. "You must have seen, sir, that we are very poor. When I looked at that basket of flowers I thought it was dreadful to have anything of such value wasted in that way, while my precious mother is toiling her life out to keep her family in simple necessities. Then it came into my head that I might sell them. I never did such a thing before, though I would not have been ashamed to if — No, that is n't quite honest. I don't like to earn money that way, but I would be glad to earn it regularly, by any straightforward, hard work, if I might be allowed."

"How 'allowed,' my dear? Can you not work if you will?"

"No; that is just it. Mother thinks her geese



are all swans, and must not swim in common mill-ponds. So she is just killing herself to keep Isabelle at the fashionable school where she studies art, in pay for her — Belle's — looking after 'primaries.' That way it does n't cost anything for the instruction; but clothes do cost, such clothes as my sister must wear if she goes fitly among such rich pupils, cost a great deal for us. Roland is the happiest of all, maybe; because he does generally earn his own way. That is, what he earns has mostly paid the rent, only now he's lost his place. I think it was the knowledge of that which upset Mother, last night. Her courage has been stretched so much that it is wearing out."

"How did he lose his position? What was it?"

"He was some sort of a clerk in a wholesale dry-goods house. I suppose he quarrelled with his employer. He hated it. He said it would have seemed a great deal manlier to him to sell stoves or steam-engines, or something not so womanish as silks and velvets; but I fancy it would have made no difference. He was born to live out of doors. He's a different boy when he happens to get an outside 'job,' once in a while."

"How old is he?"



“Sixteen. Belle is one year older than he.”

“What do you study, my dear?”

“Nothing much but music, now. Mother has a friend who is interested in the best Conservatory here, and I have the benefit of instruction there. I have an idea that this lady, this friend, pays my expenses, or advances the money to Mother for that purpose, though I do not know. I asked once, but was not told. Mother is certain I have a fortune in my voice, and she is killing herself to keep me in training. I cannot say I have not. I have no wish to run down my only legitimate stock in trade, but I don't believe I'm a Patti or a Jenny Lind. I may be, of course. Brother Robert is too little to be anything but the dearest, sweetest small chap in the world. So there you have us. We are not beggars, exactly; for Mother has a little bit of an income which ekes out the embroidery money, and so we manage. But it is n't as it should be, and what I want to know is: Could such a family as ours make a living in the country somewhere? Do you think our 'talents' could be put to any sensible use? And — do you forgive my selling your flowers?”

“My dear, I am glad if they brought you one bit of additional money. I wish you had had double the number — ”



“ Oh dear ! I don't ! That sounds saucy. But I never in the world could make my salt that way. I have n't the patience, and I have too much pride. But I did get quite a nice little sum for them, and I am sure it will do Motherkin a lot of good. Only her pride will suffer, and her heart ache a little that I could do anything without telling her first. We never have any secrets in our small household ; and I have been so low-spirited all day over mine. Only, of course, I shall make a clean breast of the business as soon as I get home.”

“ Miss Beckwith, or Beatrice, if you will let me call you so, I thank you for your confidence in me. I want to prove myself to you all that my Conrad would have been to any one dear to me, if I can. But I see very clearly that your mother is proud and self-reliant. She is not of the sort to whom one can offer pecuniary aid without offering a sting as well. I am of the same kind myself. I should not like to receive benefits at all, unless I had a chance of repaying them. I agree with the doctor that Mrs. Beckwith would be better in the country ; but I dare not propose my poor knowledge of what is best for you youngsters against a mother's wish and wisdom. Still, continue to trust me for a little while. Some way



will open to help you; and Joanna will advise me. I never take any important step without consulting her."

Bonny looked her surprise. Mr. Brook was a hale, strong-hearted man of eighty years. How odd that he should need to take counsel of anybody, least of all of a woman! "Is Joanna the sister of whom you spoke?"

"Yes. A wise and dear friend she has been to me all my life. She and I live together at the old homestead in New Windsor with the servants who have been long in our employ. I hope you will know her soon. You are certain to love her if you do."

Bonny's quick sympathy sent a momentary moisture to her bright eyes, which Mr. Brook saw clearly enough, even without his glasses, which had fallen from his nose. "Why, what, my dear?"

"Nothing — nothing, sir! Only that is so beautiful! I wonder if my Roland will love me like that when he is old, and I am! We are the 'closest chums' now; but — do you suppose it will last?"

"Let us hope it will last, my dear. And it certainly will if you do your sisterly share to make it. Never for one moment allow yourself to forget



that you are children of one mother, — the brave little mother who has toiled to keep you in one fold. Then I am as positive it ‘will last’ as that our dinner must be waiting us now!”

Bonny sprang up at once. “Thank you, Mr. Brook. And if your sister does not see how to help us into a sensible way of living, still I shall always remember you gratefully; and I will try to be to my Roland what Miss Brook has been to you. I will, indeed. But I am glad to go back to Robert. He is rather uncertain in his behavior, though the dearest little fellow in the world!”

“Indeed?” laughed Mr. Brook, dryly; and with so much of mischief in his fine old face that again Beatrice was reminded of the picture her mother had seen in the chrysanthemums, and she beguiled the way back to the hotel by a description of the little scene when the basket had arrived.

“That was pretty, very pretty. Joanna must certainly know your mother; and I have a scheme in my mind that, meeting her approval, will bring many happy days to all of us, I trust.” The old man looked up cheerily, and caught Bonny’s wondering gaze fixed upon his face. “Ah, ha, my dear! You see that youth has no monopoly of ‘looking forward.’ A man may be a deal happier



at eighty than he ever was at eighteen. I am."

They reached the hotel none too soon. Dinner had been ready for some moments, and both Mr. Dalloway and Robert were in the condition of temper which hungry men, of any size, not possessing more than the usual amount of "grace" commonly exhibit.

"Bonny! I want to go home! Right away! That horrid old man has — sp-sp-spanked — me!"



## CHAPTER VII.

### DINING IN STATE.

“IMPOSSIBLE!” cried Beatrice, catching the angry boy in her arms, and casting a defiant glance toward the irate Mr. Dolloway.

“Well, when a young one don’t know any better than to sass his elders he ’d ought to be spanked. So I done it. An’ I ’ll do it again, if I ever have occasion to.”

“Dolloway!”

Beatrice was surprised to hear how stern Mr. Brook’s voice could become, and she was delighted to see the other old fellow wince visibly. The sternness had gone home to the servant’s guilty heart, as it should.

“Truth, sir. Begging your pardon for sayin’ so. Here was I, laying myself out to entertain the boy; a telling stories till my jaws ached, and answering questions by the thousand till I could n’t talk no more. Then I remembered the checker-board we ’d brought along, and I tried to learn him how to play. The sass he give me — beat all!



He knows more 'n I do ; more 'n you do, sir ; more 'n the President of these United States and Queen Victory into the bargain."

"I — I — I don't ! I — never !" sobbed Robert.

"You did. You do — er you think you do ! Did n't you conterdict me plain to my face about them moves ? Did n't you just as good as say I cheated ?"

"Wull — wull — wull — you did !"

"Hush, Bob ! Let the old man tell his story first."

"If — if he gets his in fust — who's a goin' ter b'lieve mine ?" demanded "Humpty-Dumpty," with renewed energy. "Fust off he knocked me down with the checker-board. Think I was goin' ter stan' that ? I guess not ! So I hit him with my fist. That's all they was to it. An' I'd a been satisfied nen to quit an' begin over again, if he'd a played fair. But he would n't. Nen — he — he caught me up — an' —"

"Never mind, now. Try not to think about it. And if you have been naughty you must apologize to Mr. Dolloway."

"This — this is distressing !" exclaimed poor Mr. Brook, who hated a quarrel. "Try, both of you, to forget all about it. You were probably both almost starved. So I'll order in the dinner



at once, and that will set us all straight. Come here, my little man. Here is a quarter for you."

But the "little man" was beyond the allurements of tips. He had sustained an indignity which it seemed to him he could never forget. It had been part of Mrs. Beckwith's gentle rule that no physical violence should ever be visited upon her children. In the street the boys had taken their share of rough-and-tumble fighting with other boys, but in their own home or at their schools neither had ever received a blow. The fact and the method of Mr. Dolloway's punishment was, therefore, the more infuriating and humiliating to the really proud little boy, who was at heart as "good" as his doting sister constantly declared him.

"Go, darling!" whispered Bonny. "Don't make poor Mr. Brook feel any worse. He is unhappy about his man's rudeness to you. Go! Be generous, and take it!"

This was putting the matter in a new light; and Robert despised anything like want of generosity. He hesitated but a second longer, till Bonny added, "Go, dear!" and then he marched straight to Mr. Brook and laid his soiled hand confidently upon that gentleman's knee.

"Wull — I'll take it to 'blige you, not him. I



ain't a takin' no pay fer what he done, an' I'll lick him yet, if I get big enough. Thank you, sir. There comes the waiter man. He's been in here a lot o' times a'ready. I guess it's dinner, don't you?"

"I guess it is. In fact, I know it is. Now, my son, what did you order? And I hope you did not forget me. I'm as hungry as a bear."

"Are bears hungry?"

"They have that reputation. I am not acquainted with any bears myself, so I cannot speak from experience. Come, Dolloway, here is your especial bit of venison steak again, I see. Come, draw up to the table, all."

Mr. Dolloway sniffed, "After you is manners for me, sir."

"Stuff and nonsense, lad! Waive formality for once, and take a bit of dinner with an old friend — not after him. Come."

"No, no, sir; thank you, I never could relish my victuals with young ones to the table."

"Dolloway! sit up. That is enough of nonsense. And show the ill-taught child how he should behave — if you know how yourself."

To Beatrice's surprise, Mr. Dolloway did not apparently resent this speech of Mr. Brook's, and he immediately obeyed it. She saw then that,



familiar and almost equal as the two had seemed to her, one was still the master, the other the man.

The dinner began in silence, broken only by the host's attempts at conversation, which fell without much response; for Dalloway was stubbornly speechless, and the young Beckwiths were too much impressed by the strangeness of their surroundings to have leisure for words. Even restaurant service, to which most young city folk become early accustomed, was unknown to them, for their simple meals had always been taken at home; and the deft movements of the waiter, perplexity as to the use of the various utensils with which he provided them, and a close observation of Mr. Brook and his manner of using the big or little forks and spoons, occupied them to the exclusion of almost everything else, even food.

"Try a few of those oysters. They are delicious, my dear, they are indeed," urged the entertainer, pushing the plate of half-shells gently toward Bonny's place.

Then she rallied herself. "I must not seem ungrateful, and the food does smell so good! Only there is so much of it! One of these 'courses,' I suppose they are, would make enough for once at home. I wish Motherkin had



some oysters like these! And she shall. I will buy some on my way back." Then she turned to her host, and exerted herself to be as entertaining as Bonny Beckwith certainly could be if she willed, and before he knew it even Mr. Dalloway was laughing.

In that laugh the hatchet was buried; or rather the last ill-temper which Robert had retained vanished, and he turned merrily toward his enemy with the words: "My eye! This turkey is an awful good one, ain't it? I wish I could have you tell me what to order, every day!"

"When I was a boy I liked turkey," answered Dalloway, graciously.

"Tell me 'when you was a boy,' please. If you will I won't be sassy no more, an' I won't beat you no more."

"Some time. Not now. I did tell you all I knew, 'most."

"He says you have horses of your own, Mr. Brook!" said "Humpty-Dumpty," suddenly remembering this communication and wishing to have it verified.

"Yes, I have a number; seven in the stables now, I think. But all are not mine; one pair is my sister's. Some day I hope you will come and see them."



“Ginger! Do you? Honest Injun?”

“Certainly. Why should you doubt it?”

“Oh — because I hit *him*, an’ I’m a ‘young one,’ an’ — I’m gen’ally doin’ somethin’ I had n’t oughter. But if you mean it I’ll come, if my mother will let me.”

“I shall ask her,” said Mr. Brook, cheerfully. “I have hopes she will say ‘yes.’ Then Dolloway, here, shall teach you how to ride.”

“No, I sha’n’t teach nobody to break his neck.”

“Perhaps you may have a horse of your own, some day,” calmly pursued Mr. Brook, undisturbed by Dolloway’s present rebellion against authority.

Robert gasped. Such a “perhaps” literally took his breath away. Then he asked:

“Could I ride him bareback?”

“I presume you would attempt it.”

“If I ’tempted it I’d do it. They ain’t no back down ter me; I’ve got grit, I have. Bonny, here, she would ’a’ give up — kerflummux! a sellin’ those chrysms, but I made her hold on. If it had n’t ’a’ been fer me she would n’t ’a’ made nothin’, hardly.”

Bonny winced. The least said about chrysanthemums the better she liked it now. But



she answered: "How about the dozen which Miss Agnew bought? Where were you at that time?"

Robert ignored the inquiry. He had now eaten all that his capacity permitted, and he began to think of home. Not that homesickness troubled him, but a longing to boast of that day's experience over the humdrum, matter-of-fact life which had probably gone on in the Second Avenue flat.

"Say, Bon! It's time fer a feller ter go! Motherkin 'll be gettin' worried 'bout us."

"If Mr. Brook will excuse us we will go at once, before the up-town cars get crowded."

"Golly! Will you ride? Eh?"

"Yes, dear. We are a long way from our own neighborhood now."

"I know that. But I've walked it before, when I did n't have no such good dinner inside of me. I'd laugh if I could n't now!"

"Very well. We'll try it, then."

But they were not to be permitted. When they turned to bid their host good-by, they found him with his hat on, ready to accompany them to the street. "You must allow me to put you in a cab, my dears. Yes, yes. Indeed, I shall permit nothing else. You are to say all kind things to



the family for me, and I will write your mother or you, after I reach home and have seen Joanna. One thing, remember. I am not a new acquaintance. I am an old and tried friend. You can trust me. You can expect to see a great deal of me, if you will. Good-by."

"Good-by." "Good-by! Don't forget about my visit to you!" "Thank you. Good-by."

Around whirled the cab, and off up the street sped — no, crawled — the vehicle, among the lines of trucks and wagons, street-cars, hacks, and carriages, till Beatrice felt she could have outstripped that pace on her own light feet.

"But it's riding, all the same, Bon! Let's play pretend it's our own carriage and we have been down town to buy a horse."

"No; a house in the country."

"Horses too. An' we're goin' ter live 'swell' forever after. We're goin' ter have turkey every day."

"Every other day, dear; it would be better for our digestion."

"What's digestion?"

"It is the one thing which the impecunious young Beckwiths have in perfection."

"Pooh! What's the use of saying words a mile long? An' why don't you give a real answer?"



“ I like to use long words. It’s the only luxury I can afford. And the real answer is, the prime condition of our ‘ insides,’ which allow us to eat anything from ‘ A to Izzard.’ There, let’s get out at this corner. I want to invest a little of my money in a few oysters for Motherkin, as well as to pay you the seventy-five cents I promised.”

They dismissed the cab at the corner of Third Avenue and hurried into the nearest market, where Bonny selected with utmost care a dozen of the very finest “ bivalves ” she could find ; but when she offered the promised reward to her little brother he surprised her by refusing to take it.

“ Why, Bob ! Why not ? Are you ill ? What is the matter ? ”

“ No, I ain’t ill. Can’t a feller do a gen’rous thing ’ithout his folks ’cusin’ him o’ bein’ sick ? But, say ! Wait a minute ! I will take it, too. I’ll take it an’ give it to my mother myself. I earned it fair an’ square, did n’t I ? ”

“ Of course you did. And you are a perfect darling that you do not wish to waste it on yourself. Mother will be delighted with your unselfishness ! If it were n’t in the street I’d kiss you, sweetheart ! ”



“ Well, you need n’t. An’ I’ve got a quarter, anyway. That is more’n I’ve had in a dog’s age before. Do you s’pose my mother will scold me for running away from school ? ”

“ As you draw near home your conscience begins to prick you, does n’t it ? Mine does. I did n’t feel half as guilty before.”

There was such a sympathy in this matter that despite its being on the “ street ” and a place where exhibitions of affection were out of place, the brother and sister clasped hands with an eagerness that told how much they really feared the quiet glance of disapproval which Mrs. Beckwith would make her only punishment.

But it was not Beatrice’s habit to acknowledge herself worsted till compelled ; and she dashed into the little parlor of their flat crying, as gayly as she could : “ Fairy gifts, Motherkin ! I’ve discovered the secret of transmuting posies into pounds, petals into pennies, and chrysanthemums into oysters ! Behold — and believe ! ”

“ Ahem ! Miss Beatrice, this is truly fortunate. I had begun to despair of seeing you.”

The girl wheeled suddenly about, and there, spectacles on nose and music-roll in hand, sat the Professor of Voice Culture who was training her for “ her career,” and whom she had faithfully



promised to meet that day for “a particular reason of obligingness to me myself ; that may mean a much of benefit to the poor old Herr Doctor.”

Until that instant she had utterly forgotten the teacher's request and her promise, and the regret with which she now recalled it effectually banished all affected hilarity. Dropping her package of “saddle rocks,” she held out both hands to the shabby-looking German, with an accent of such keen distress in her voice that he forgave her on the instant : “Oh, sir ! I am so sorry. But — I never thought of it, not once. Has it made a great difference ? ”

“No, no, — not so great — but the mother — ”

Bonny turned once more, this time to be confronted by another visitor, and oddly enough another teacher, the head master of the parochial institution where Robert was supposed to learn more refinement than he could at the public schools of the city.

“My dear, Mr. Benton. He has called about Robert's absence, fearing he was ill. He also has a broken engagement to explain. Where have you both been all day ? ”

“Mother ! must I tell — now — before these ? ”

“I know of no reason why you should not. I hope my children have not absented themselves



from their duties for any cause which they would be ashamed to mention." There was both pride and pain in the widow's tone, and Bonny opened her lips to "make a clean breast of the matter," but a second thought restrained her. What she had done might have been unwise, but she saw no reason to explain their actual poverty to "all the world." For the first time in her life she refused to answer her mother's question, and a spot of heightened color burned on each cheek as she bowed and murmured: "I cannot give the reason now, dear. Please do not press me;" and immediately quitted the apartment.

But alas for the Beckwith pride! In her haste Beatrice forgot that she had left the garrulous "Humpty-Dumpty" behind her.



## CHAPTER VIII.

### PROPOUNDING A RIDDLE.

“**G**INGER! If Bon has n’t dropped them oysters down kerflump!” cried Robert, picking up the brown paper parcel and laying it on his mother’s lap. Then he plunged one pudgy hand deep in the corner of his pocket, where the hole had been pinned together, and produced four silver quarters. “Hi! there, Motherkin! See *them?*” and he cast a supercilious glance about upon the spectators, as if pitying the envy which must thrill their breasts.

“I see, dear. But go and make your excuses to Mr. Benton. I have had none to make for you.”

Robert immediately crossed to the master’s side and explained: “I could n’t come ter school to-day, sir, ’cause my sister had ter go an’ sell some chrysms on the Avenue, an’ I did n’t like ter let her go alone. It ain’t nice fer girls to go ter places alone, my mother says.”

When the child had reached this point in his disclosures Isabelle rose rather hurriedly and left





HE CAST A SUPERCILIOUS GLANCE ABOUT HIM.







the room by the same door which had covered Bonny's exit.

“Well, my boy. If you have a valid reason for your absence we will have to see about getting you excused. But there has been too much of this truanting, and we have resolved to put a stop to it. We have not quite the authority which the public school teachers have, else we should not be so troubled. An examination for promotion is to be held next week, and I felt that Robert had no time to lose if he wished to go forward with his class. Besides, he had promised to assist me a little in preparing for an evening entertainment in aid of the school, and I depended on him. He was to have been a little ‘Red Cross Knight,’ but owing to his absence I was obliged to give his place to another boy.”

Five minutes later both the Professor and Mr. Benton had departed, and Bonny immediately reappeared. “Mother! don’t look at me so grieved. I am bad, I know; as bad as I can be. But I don’t mean it, and I really felt as if I were doing something very praiseworthy when I set out on my adventures this morning. I was in quite a glow of self-righteousness. I was, indeed!”

“How about the glow now, my child?” asked



the mother, gently stroking the flushed face resting on her knee.

“It’s gone. But — but this remains ;” and she counted out the contents of her little purse, which amounted to about ten dollars. “That is n’t so very bad, though it’s about one fourth of what I anticipated bringing home. As it is, nine dollars of this came from one person.”

“Beatrice ! Not from Mr. Brook, I hope !”

“No, Motherkin. But *will* you forgive me ? I’ll never do so again. I promise you. And I’ve so much to tell. I can’t wait till I tell it, yet it does n’t come easy with that sort of a wall of displeasure and sorrow between us. Please take your bad girl back, down deep into the happy place in your heart again, Mother darling ! I hate to feel unhappy ! I do, awfully !”

Her whimsical entreaty covered a regret so sincere that Mrs. Beckwith understood, and stooping kissed very tenderly the tumbled curls of her energetic daughter. There was a trace of tears in her own eyes as she lifted her head, but there was no further word of blame or repentance between them ; yet Beatrice never forgot that hour, nor did she ever again test any scheme, no matter how brilliant its promise, without taking her mother into confidence first.



“Well, then, that’s settled and done with. I feel better, very much better. And Robert is not to be blamed at all. Nor am I, even, for part of my badness. I forgot that. Mr. Brook has part of the blame. He claims it, and I’m sure I’m willing he should enjoy it.”

“My daughter, have you been to see Mr. Brook?”

“Yes, ’m, I have. I’ve dined with him. At the Astor House. In a private parlor. But that was n’t the beginning of the story. You should let people begin at the beginning, Mother dear.”

“Begin at the beginning, Beatrice.”

The recital was given, amid the comments and illustrations of the youngest Beckwith; no details were omitted, and it ended with the question: “If this good friend of our grandfather’s finds some place that we could live in the country, would you go, Mother?”

“For my own part, I should be glad to go. But your education, the different careers which may be open to you here, my children, these must be considered first. All the young people are leaving the country places and flocking to the towns, if we are to believe the articles we read. If those who have been born and reared in the



country cannot make a decent livelihood there, how can we expect to do so?"

"Well, you see, Motherkin! we're all geniuses! That's the theory we are living on now; and a genius can do what no less gifted mortal can! But all jesting aside, Mr. Brook agrees with the doctor that your health would be a great deal better in a country place than here; and I'll risk the rest of the question for that great gain. So should you, if you love us."

"Well, well, dearie. The question is not to be met to-night. But those oysters you brought in and dropped so disdainfully upon the floor will taste very nicely to us who have *not* dined at the Astor House upon roast turkey and other good things galore. Would you object to broiling me a few?"

After all, the day ended merrily. The Beckwiths had a faculty of making mirth out of trifles, and it kept them all from growing sour or cross-grained over the inevitable hardships of their lot in life. Roland brought out his banjo and forgot the day's hopeless search for a new situation in the picking up of a melody that had caught his ear. Belle worked hard to make a realistic "study" of chrysanthemums from the two or three which Beatrice had left behind



her that morning on her mother's kitchen table. Mrs. Beckwith "outlined" a pattern against the next day's finer embroidering; Robert played at jack-straws till he had "beaten himself" a satisfying number of times; while Beatrice moved everywhere about the little home, putting away scattered papers and books, dusting carefully each nook and corner, and finally sitting down to peruse a cook-book in the hope of finding some desirable dish for the next day's dinner which would cost next to nothing in the concocting.

A busy week followed, busy for all save Roland, and yet even for him, though his labors were without apparent result; and then the postman brought the letter which all except Bonny had nearly forgotten, the letter that Mr. Brook was to write after consultation with his sister, Miss Joanna.

It was "Humpty-Dumpty" who received the communication from the messenger and flew upstairs with it, crying out: "I bet this is the country letter! I bet it's Mr. Brook has found a home for us an' a horse! Read it, won't you, Motherkin, quick?"

"It is very brief, my dears; but it contains an invitation for Roland to go up and see Mr. Brook



at his own home. He writes that there are some things much better discussed in person than by mail, and unless he hears to the contrary he will send a carriage to meet my son at the railway station nearest his house on Thursday — why, that is to-morrow! He adds that he trusts the meeting will not be fruitless of good to all concerned, else he would not suggest it. Well, well.”

“‘Well’ means ‘yes,’ does n’t it?” demanded Bonny, eagerly.

“I wonder how much it will cost!” remarked Roland, reflectively.

“No matter, sir. We’ll write another poem on somebody’s medicine and earn the price of the trip, maybe! Anyway, there is the chrysanthemum money which my mother has punished me by refusing to touch; you shall take that. Then Mr. Brook can feel that he has paid your way and will have no scruples about that matter. In his heart of hearts, the dear old gentleman has been worried over it, I know, just as well as if I had heard him say: ‘But, Joanna, they are so poor! What if he goes to the expense for nothing!’ and she has comforted him by saying: ‘Never mind, Chidly dear, we will make it up to them in some way. The young



man must come, of course.' You see how it is, don't you, Motherkin?"

"I see that, among you, you would wheedle the foolish old Motherkin into letting all of you sacrifice your own best interests because you happen to think a country life is best for her!" answered Mrs. Beckwith, smiling fondly upon them all. "But Roland must go. No matter if we could afford it even less than by Bonny's exploit we are fortunately able, it would be a rudeness not to accept the invitation. Yet, Roland, remember; it is no light task you are undertaking, and you must not bring back rose-colored reports unless the facts will bear them out; that is, I want you to look at everything with practical eyes."

"I'll try, Mother. But my opinion cannot decide the question."

"Your opinion may soon have to decide all family matters, my son," answered Mrs. Beckwith, with a gravity that woke a sudden terror in their loving hearts.

But Bonny would have none of this! Trouble — sorrow — should not come to them, not such sorrow as her mother's tone suggested; and with the swift rebellion of her hopeful nature she turned upon her brother playfully. "Yes, my



Laureate. Just take the poetical part of you off and give it to me. I'll lock it safely up in my own bureau till you return. And, see; here's the money! Oh, Bob! don't you wish you were the big brother instead of the little one? Think of seeing your friend Mr. Dolloway again!"

Three days later Roland had made his journey and returned; and the first glance Bonny gave to his face set her heart to beating gayly. "Oh! I see it's good news you bring, Laureate! You needn't try to look so solemn, you're so happy you could dance!" which was the one thing Roland never attempted to do.

"Here he is, Motherkin! And he *is* rose-colored, though he tries not to be."

"Ah, my son! We have missed you greatly. But did you have a pleasant time?"

"Mother, it's delightful! It is. Just the plain, common-sense side of it is too good to be true. It is all so much better than we any of us dreamed that I hardly know how to begin."

"I know, Roland!" interposed Robert. "Begin as we like stories to do: 'Once upon a time.'"

"All right, little chap. 'Once upon a time' there was an old gentleman that had a great deal of money, much more than he needed himself,



and he liked to do good with it. He was a peculiar old gentleman, too. He did n't believe in the actual giving away of this money, as we sometimes give to the street beggars; but he would help those who wanted to help themselves. He said that was the Lord's own way, and he certainly could not improve upon it. So all his life long he has been putting tumble-down people on their feet, and educating ignorant ones, and building little homes for homeless folks, who generally plucked up courage enough to earn the cost of the homes themselves at last. All which the splendid old fellow did n't tell me himself; but I found out by asking more questions of everybody I met than even Bob could ask in the same length of time."

"You could n't!" said Robert, indignantly.

"I did, small sir. I'll prove it by anybody who saw me while I was in New Windsor town! Well, sure enough, when I got to the station there was a cosey carriage waiting for me, and in it, not just the servant I had expected to see, but Mr. Brook and the sweetest-faced old lady I ever saw."

"Roland! *Did* — you go and take that poetry-side out of my drawer before you started?" asked Bonny, pathetically.



“No, miss. This is plain, unvarnished fact. Miss Brook is like her brother, only — more so! She looks like him, with a little smaller features and a bonnet on. She wears white curls each side her face, and her bonnet is big enough to cover her head, and she had on a soft-colored old shawl; India, I think she called it. She is very decided and quick, but not harsh. It is only that her mind seems to go as fast as Bonny’s does, though more wisely.”

“Thanks. Next chapter, please,” remarked the object of comparison, slipping her arm within her brother’s.

“Well, I will skip the rest, for a minute, and hurry to the ‘plan.’ Mr. Brook has a house he would like to rent us. It stands on the land adjoining his own place, and was owned by some city people who got dissatisfied and left. He bought it partly as an investment, and partly to prevent undesirable persons coming to live there. It is old and picturesque, but it is in good order. It has a revolutionary history, — that is, the west side has; the eastern half is more modern. It stands almost upon the river bank, though on a bluff above it, and the orchard slopes quite down to the water. The rent is two hundred dollars a year, which is one hundred less



than we pay now. It seemed to me that there was more room in it than we needed, but Mr. Brook said he thought not. And Bob's friend, Dolloway, who went through the house with us, remarked: 'I should think you'd be glad to have room enough to swing a cat in for once!' and I concluded that it might be pleasant. The house is partly furnished; that is, there are curtains of some sort at the windows, and matting on the floors. There are closets everywhere, and one room is just as General Somebody used it. I declare, I was ashamed to find my history so rusty, for the whole locality is historic. And—Oh, Mother, I do hope you will think favorably of it!"

"The main question is earning our living there; that is, if I can bring myself to take you away from your schools."

"We talked that all over. There are ten acres with the house. There is also a little greenhouse, where Mr. Brook thinks we could raise early vegetables and flowers for market. Miss Brook says that you could do your embroidery there as well as here, and that if it seemed best the girls could come into the city for their lessons once or twice a week. They said we ought to keep one cow and a horse, and they had a plan by which



we could make the horse pay for its keep; that is, if we were willing to work."

"Are you, my dears? Remember it is not congenial work, nothing to do with books and music and art. But I was brought up in the country myself, and I know that the only way to get a living out of land is, as my guardian used to say, 'dig it out.' It seems strange for us, with our ignorance, to go back and attempt to do what the real country people have given up as a failure. I am more than doubtful about our success."

"Mother, I never knew you to be so undecided about anything! I have always felt you knew long beforehand just what was best; don't let us think of this thing at all if it troubles you," said Isabelle, gently.

"There was never so much at stake before, my dear. But I will waver no longer. Let us each make the most of our last winter in the city, and in the spring we will go to New Windsor. Now, my Beatrice, if that soup of yours is ready we will have our dinner."

They rose promptly, but soberly. Even Bonny could not shake off the influence of her mother's thoughtful words, though she tried to jest as usual, and began to sing a gay little melody that



Belle liked, till Roland interrupted her by saying: "Oh, I forgot; here is a little letter for you, from Mr. Brook," and gave her an unsealed envelope.

"For me? How nice! But — how queer! Listen to this, all of you!"

MY DEAR MISS BEATRICE, — The name of the place where I hope you will live, is The Lindens, from the trees which surround it. You will find your fortune in those trees if you search for it. I leave your quick wit to solve the riddle. Faithfully Yours,

PHILIPSE CHIDLY BROOK.



## CHAPTER IX.

### THE FIRST EVENING IN THE NEW HOME.

A FEW months later, when the spring was just opening, Beatrice and Roland stood on the wide porch of the old house in New Windsor, eagerly watching the approach of a carriage which was bringing to the Lindens the rest of their family. The girl's feet could not keep from dancing, and the lad's spirits found vent in a whistle so merry and so spontaneous that old Mr. Dolloway, hearing it, muttered grimly: "I hope he can keep on a feeling that way after he's tried farming a spell. I don't see any great fun in hard work myself, an' that's what he'll get, an' plenty of it."

"Oh! I hope Motherkin will not be disappointed! Think of her trusting everything to her children, and saying that what we like will certainly suit her! Was there ever such a love of a mother in this world?"

"No, Bonny, I don't believe there ever was. I can imagine no human being more perfect than our mother."



"I mean she shall have a splendid rest now. This air is perfectly delicious! It fairly tingles through my veins, it is so pure and brilliant!"

The brother fell to whistling again.

"See! The buds are really swelling on my lindens! I wonder what their secret is."

"I thought you professed to having found out?"

"Not quite. I did think, from the stories I have read about Revolutionary times here, that perhaps Mr. Brook believed there was a buried treasure underneath those trees somewhere. But last night I asked him, and he laughed so gayly that I knew I was on the wrong track. Miss Joanna laughed, too, and asked me if I thought all the poor old soldiers had money to bury, because she had certainly heard of enough being searched for to supply the whole army with wealth, and yet history told us that they suffered great privations. There *have* been some 'pots of gold' resurrected right here in this New Windsor town, but they did not hold enough to enrich anybody, and their contents are preserved more as curiosities than used to supply common wants."

"So you give up that idea entirely?"

"Entirely. There they come. Oh, Mother! Here at last!"



Considerate in all things, Mr. Brook had sent his own carriage to the station to bring Mrs. Beckwith and Belle with little Robert, but he had not accompanied it himself. He wanted the first glimpse of her new home should be an impartial one on the lady's part, and he was too prejudiced a person to refrain from pointing out this or that favorable feature of the spot he loved so well. So the family were quite by themselves, and free to express their thoughts as they were inclined without fear of wounding anybody's preferences, had there been any danger of their doing so. But there was not. As Roland had said, when he returned from that first visit of the autumn before, "It is all so much better than one could have dreamed!" was the one and only feeling of the brave little woman who stepped down from the carriage with happy face and shining eyes.

"Here at last, my darling! All together once more. Are you not tired out with all your hard work? And, Roland, my son, it actually seems to me you have grown, even in these few days!"

"Grown in importance, Motherkin. He's really very 'masterful' up here. He feels that he is the head of the family now, in good earnest. You should hear him say: 'Bonny! that room *must* be my mother's. It is the very sunniest, pleasantest



in the whole house!’ in such a tone. As if a body wished to dispute his royal highness! But — how *do* you like it? And how did you manage in the boarding-house, after we came away with the ‘things’?”

“Oh, we managed nicely. Did everything come? Don’t you think you are very smart, you two, to take the whole responsibility of settling a house, and such a big house as this? How nice it looks! How pretty, nay, how beautiful, it all is! See the delicate green of those tree-buds! And that clump of willows by the river-side. What an exquisite color! And the plashing of the water at the foot of the bluff! I had no idea it was so lovely!”

“Now, Motherkin! That’s charming of you; but you don’t wish to waste all your enthusiasm out of doors, I hope. As for those willow boughs, I can tell you exactly what to do them in. Cadmium, Motherkin, cadmium yellow, number two, with shadows of *terre verte* and umber. Oh! I know! I was taken with just such an artistic spasm the other day when I was scrubbing the kitchen pantry, and I sat right down and made a study of those willows on the back of the moulding-board. I did n’t quite finish it, though, for Roland called to me to help him with the stove-



pipe, and that sort of dampened my spirits for a while. Stove-pipes have a depressing influence on mankind generally, I believe; for we could n't get it right, though we tried never so, and after a little while Roland had to call on Mr. Dolloway for advice. He — I fancy I had best not tell what he said. It would n't have been allowed in polite society. He — ”

“Bonny, do keep still! Mother, she talks all the time up here. That is one drawback I have discovered to this paradise. It is either talk or sing with Beatrice; she cannot keep still a minute.”

“Never mind! A *happy* racket never is disturbing to *me*. So this is my room? Well, I thank you for selecting one so big and cheerful. How well our old furniture does look, after all! And what pretty matting! It — seems like a dream. And there is almost as much space in this one apartment as in the whole of our little flat. I feel like a Mrs. Croesus! And what a light for my embroidery!”

“Motherkin, you are not to embroider one stitch for one whole week. True. Roland has said so, and you will not dare to disobey the Laureate — and the head of the family — combined!”

It was indeed a cheerful, picturesque old farm-



house, and could not have been situated more pleasantly. To the east, across the river, the highlands were violet in the light of the setting sun, and the broad stream itself was flecked here and there by the white-sailed boats which had awaked from the winter's sleep with the opening of navigation, and now darted busily up and down intent upon making lost time good. Barges and steam-tugs, a steamer or two, and the rattle of trains on both banks of the Hudson gave what Roland called "an American flavor to an idyllic picture," and convinced them all that in turning their backs upon the city they had not left behind them all connection with its stirring life.

"Now the greenhouse, Mother! Then you may have your supper. Miss Brook invited us there to-night, but I asked her to excuse us. I thought you would be tired and would like to eat your first meal in your new home. Though we are all to go there to dine to-morrow, and she is coming over to see you 'early in the morning,' which means early, too! Those two people have not a thing to do except please themselves; and how do you think they do it? One of the 'hows'?"

"Don't tire us with conundrums, Bonny!"



pleaded Isabelle, who had made a swift tour of the whole premises and now returned to the empty little glass house where the rest had gathered.

“By having their breakfast at seven o’clock the year round!”

“Then during the week you have passed with them you have either suffered or been impolite!” said Mrs. Beckwith, with conviction.

“I was n’t impolite, Motherkin. I did n’t keep them waiting, — they would n’t have waited, though, — but I was on hand every morning, sharp. So was Roland. Oh! that youth is a changed young man! If it only lasts!”

“Now, here,” said Roland, paying no attention to Bonny’s banter, “is where I have sowed my celery seed. Here is lettuce; there radishes; there onions, tomatoes, and by this side a few early potatoes. Isn’t that like living?”

“Roland, how did you know what to do? And how have you had time to accomplish so much since you came? Shall you like it?”

“Mother, you are almost as curious as Bob! It does me good to hear it. I was taught what to do by Mr. Brook’s gardener. And we have not wasted any of the hours during this past week, anyway. And I shall like it — immensely.



I never felt so much a man in all my life."

"Why, you ain't a man, Roland! You're only a boy," remarked Robert, feeling a bit jealous of this big brother who had had a whole week at the Lindens, while he had been forced to remain in a city boarding-house till Beatrice and the "Laureate" prepared the home for their mother's coming. "And don't it look funny to see our old things in this new house! I found my own bed the first thing. It's in a room all by my own self, 'cause Bon said so. That bed is new if nothin' else ain't, an' I'm as much 'count as you if I can have a bedroom too."

"I think that is one of the luxuries of the situation, that each member of the household can have his or her own little apartment to do in just as he pleases."

"To do in not at all as he pleases, you mean! That girl has fidgeted herself sick lest there should be a speck of dirt left anywhere for your eyes to find, Mother. And if I laid a single thing down in my room — so-called — she'd pounce upon it and hang it up or hide it away, lest the place should 'look like fury.'"

"Well, she has her reward. I really think she has done wonders, as well as you. And now I



think I smell a cup of tea. If your supper is ready, Miss Housekeeper, I should be pleased to eat it."

They had not been allowed to enter the dining-room before. Bonny had prepared her table and then locked the door. She wanted that room, next to the mother's the most cheerful room in the house, to be a surprise to them; and she now opened the door with a flourish of arms, then stood back to enjoy the look of pleasure she was sure her mother's face would show.

"Oh, how pretty! My dear, you *have* kept the best to the last. And this will be our living-room, our 'home' room; and as we break bread together in it for the first time, let us each resolve that into this room, whatever of sorrow may come, there shall never come an angry word or an unloving thought. Three times each day, God willing, we will gather here *in peace*."

"Then let's call it the 'peace-room,' Mother-kin!" cried "Humpty-Dumpty," touched for almost the first time in his life to a bit of sentiment by the sweet solemnity of his mother's face.

"Good for you, small sir! It's a compact! Your hand upon it, little brother! And whenever you get into a scrape, if ever such an un-



heard-of thing should happen, remember this room shall be a retreat where you will be safe. I, too; and between us —”

“It will not be often unoccupied!” said Belle, saucily, and moved her mother’s chair to its place.

“What a great, big fireplace! And ain’t it wicked to burn so much wood, Roland? Must ’a’ cost a heap!” remarked Bob, leaning his head on his hands, and gazing reflectively into the bright wood fire which flamed on the hearth.

He had voiced his mother’s own thought, and she looked toward the elder son for explanation.

“No, Bob; it cost nothing but a little labor. That fire is made of driftwood which washed up on our own land. I dragged it to the wood-house and cut it up myself. Of course, Mr. Brook had a hand in the business, as he has in all this good fortune. He lent me his saw and axe; and I am to keep them till I can buy some of my own. Think of having anybody lend you anything! It is a new experience for us.”

“We do not want to become borrowers, on the strength of it, more than is necessary, my dear,” said Mrs. Beckwith.

“Don’t you fear. I am quite as independent as you, by nature. But I’ve found out something, Mother. There is as much kindness in



accepting favors, sometimes, as in conferring them. Mr. Brook feels that he is responsible for our being here. He wishes to help us get started and everything running smoothly, and then I think he means to leave us to stand on our own feet. He has sent his man over every day to help me about the grounds, and Mr. Dolloway — oh! Mr. Dolloway!”

Bonny echoed her brother's groan in so comical a manner that Robert demanded instantly: “What's he done, Bon? Has he been a lickin' you? 'Cause —”

“'Cause why, my lad?”

“'Cause he'd better not! I'll lick him back if he 'tempts it! I studied that out coming along.”

“No; he does n't ‘lick’ me. It would be a relief if he did. He simply stands and prophesies evil till I am about distracted. Then I get mad and long to ‘sass’ him — but don't. For a man who has lived with such a master as long as he has he is the grumpiest old chap you can imagine. He seems to be glad to have us here, thinks ‘it's a fine thing to have the prop'ty let, after lyin' idle so long, yet is sure it will go to wrack and ruin bein' took care of by a passel o' young ones an' one lorn female.’ My goodness!



Here he comes now. Speaking o' angels, you know. And what has he brought this time — but — a cat!"

"Yes, I always feel a place never can look homelike without a cat around," explained the visitor, when questioned by Beatrice, "so I fetched this one over. She's a good mouser, an' if you don't feed her too much 'll do well. H'm-m. Hope you like the looks o' things, ma'am," said Mr. Dolloway, after he had been brought in and duly presented to Mrs. Beckwith and Belle. As for Robert, the child's presence was utterly ignored; and finding this the case, he sauntered out of the room on a tour of private inspection, or for some reason of his own which he did not care to mention.

"I do like the looks of things very, very much. I am sure we shall be very happy here if only our plans for earning our livelihood do not miscarry. To-night I feel as rich as a queen in a new palace."

"H'm-m. Just keep a feelin' so, ma'am. Our folks are powerful glad you've come, an' things 'll go. But I dunno how they would 'a' gone if it had n't been for me looking after these children you sent up here. They mean well, but — My soul! What in the world!"



The horrible sounds which had interrupted Mr. Dolloway's discourse appeared to come from the rear of the house, and thither everybody rushed to learn their cause.

"Burglars!" thought Mrs. Beckwith, trembling.

"Tramps!" echoed Isabelle, recalling all the outrages of that fraternity which she had ever seen recorded in the newspapers.

"Sounds like some wild animal!" cried Roland, and tried to open the door backwards, in his haste.

"My soul! It's a cat! My — cat — I — believe!" exclaimed the visitor, wildly.

"Oh! where is Robert? My little boy — my baby!" wailed the anxious mother, as the sounds continued, and grew even fiercer.

Where was he, indeed! Till that moment they had not missed him, but now each face paled with apprehension as his absence was discovered.

"Oo-row-mur-rrow-screech! -s-spst! Ee-e-yoww!"

"Humph! It's my opinion that that sound and my small brother are connected!" said Bonny, composedly.

"Oh! if they should be!" cried Mrs. Beckwith, now actually sobbing with terror.



## CHAPTER X.

### ANOTHER LITTLE EPISODE.

“**E**VEN if they should be, we have lived long enough to know that ‘Humpty-Dumpty’ is all right. He has as many lives as a cat.”

“Beatrice!”

By the time they reached the outer kitchen, whence the terrible sounds proceeded, Robert had been collared by Mr. Dolloway and was being shaken violently to and fro, while Roland was pitifully caressing the cat which their guest had brought, and which cowered in its rescuer’s embrace, hiding its head beneath the friendly arm and shivering as if in an ague.

“Mr. Dolloway! What are you doing? Can you and my darling never meet but you must come to an open battle? It is perfectly scandalous!” cried Bonny, indignantly, and taking upon herself the reproof of the troublesome neighbor.

“Yes, miss! That is what I say! It is a burning shame and a scandalous outrage! I’ll teach him, the little whelp! They’s a society of Prevention folks up here, and I’ll hand *his* name



in afore I'm many days older, or *my* name ain't spelt John Dolloway!"

"Will—you—lemme—'lone? I'll—I'll—"

Hereupon Mrs. Beckwith laid her hand upon the old man's arm, and he instantly released his hold of the unhappy "Humpty-Dumpty."

"Robert, what did you do?"

"I—I jest—I—He said—Oh! oh!"

"Silence, my son. Wait till you can collect yourself, then answer me."

For the space of a few seconds the little boy's sobs and moans continued, then he looked up as brightly as if trouble were a thing unknown. "He said they was room to swing a cat, an' I was a measurin' to see how much that was; that's all."

"How did you attempt the measurement?"

"Why—why—I held her by the tail an' swung her roun'; that's all."

"All! Why did n't you stop when she yelled and you saw it hurt her?" demanded Roland, severely.

"Why—'cause."

"Because what?"

"I—I liked ter hear it. It did sound so funny. I thought I should laugh myself sick—she was so mad!"



“Robert, go to your room. You know which it is.” Mrs. Beckwith’s voice was stern, and her small reprobate immediately prepared to obey it, but unfortunately cast one glance Beatrice-ward, and changed his mind.

“She said it was a ‘retreat’ when folks was in a scrape. I — I bet I’m in one now; so I — I’d ruther go to the peace-room, Motherkin,” said the child, sweetly. “If you are willing, Mother dear.”

Mrs. Beckwith could not restrain a fleeting smile, and Roland laughed outright; but the mother’s “no” had always been “no,” with no sign of wavering about it, and she did not begin their new life with any lax discipline, much as she would have so preferred. “No, Robert. You have been cruel, and I cannot excuse you. Remain upstairs until I come to you. Now, Mr. Dollo-way, please accept my sincerest apologies for this unkindness. I do not seek to lessen my little boy’s fault, but if you will trust us and leave the poor cat here, I am sure I can promise you that no such maltreatment will ever be given it again.”

“Well, ma’am, I must say you have spoke like a lady. An’ I hain’t no wish to be behind-hand in my neighborliness. But — though I



hain't no right to mention it, so bein' 's you 're his mother — if that there shaver ain't born ter be hung I 'm mistook."

"I trust you are mistaken. But come into the dining-room, again, please. I should like to have you tell me anything you happen to think of about our new home. I am so great a stranger to the locality that I am as eager as a child to hear its history. Will you not?"

"Thank you, ma'am. I guess not. I just stepped across to say if they was anything any of us could do for you we was to be notified. Them was Mr. Brook's own words. An' him an' her both hopes you will rest well an' find things comfortable. I left a basket of late-keepin' apples in the pantry, an' I make my good evenin's to you, ma'am."

The door had scarcely closed behind him before Bonny began to laugh. "You really must let me have it out, Motherkin, or I shall be sure to do it before Bob. That will make him think lightly of his sin. But now you can foresee how delightfully the monotony of our existence will be varied by the 'little episodes' between that ancient worthy and our small sinner."

"Beatrice, it is really too miserable an occurrence to jest over."



“But just *sub rosa* this way. And I warn you, you are deluded into the impression that you know your own mind and that you can manage your own house. But it will be left for Mr. Dolloway to convince you that you do not. He takes a lively interest in all his master’s schemes, and in us — his latest — particularly. He will be the thorn to this rose, the rod of correction to our careless lives. Fortunately in this case not like master is the man. Well, I’ll clear away the tea-things now;” and Beatrice departed kitchenward to put on a big apron.

Isabelle proffered her assistance, but it was laughingly declined as “not available.” “No, dear, not to-night. You’re company, and I am in an angelic mood. You’d better enjoy it while it lasts; so run out and take another walk with the ‘head of the family,’ whom I see strutting about over his garden patch as if he were king of the whole earth. My big brother *is* a poet; but he is also a born farmer. He loves the smell of the soil, and I know it was the making of him to come up here. He’d have grown into a disappointed, narrow-minded tape-seller if he’d stayed in town always. Now — well, I hardly dare tell you all I foresee in my Roland’s future!”

“Oh, Bonny! has n’t all this hard work you



have been doing taken the enthusiasm out of you yet? It seems lovely up here, and oh, so peaceful! But isn't it just a bit too quiet and humdrum?"

"Trot along, miss! To-morrow when I hand over the housekeeping to you the humdrumness will disappear!"

"Why — what do you mean, Beatrice?"

"Coming events cast no shadows before in this case. When I have finished my dishes, Mother will be down again with her youngest in a beatific state of mind, looking as sweet and innocent as if he had been the sinner against instead of the sinner; then I'll call you and Roland in, and we'll talk over everything and arrange a fair division of labor."

"Why, Bonny! One would think you had all the responsibility of this undertaking, to hear you talk! Isn't my mother to have a word of influence, miss?"

"She is to have all the words she wants, but none of the work that I can help. Well, I don't mean that exactly; but wait, and I'll tell you what I do mean. Now, trot!"

Thus dismissed, Isabelle joined her brother in the garden. To her, at present, it seemed but a patch of muddy ground, though to the natural gar-



dener who was to labor in it, it already presented a picture of thrift and greenness. "Think of it, Isabelle Beckwith! A week ago we had not a fraction of an acre over which to rule, now we have ten whole ones! I'm like Motherkin, as rich as Croesus!"

"I'm afraid we shall get so sick of it. And we have cut loose now from so much that it would be hard to get back into even the old, modest places we held in the city. One never steps down for a moment but somebody else steps up into one's place. As soon as I told the principal of our school that I would have to resign mine, she appointed somebody else at once. I could not get back the position if I would."

"You must not look backward, Belle. We have done what seems the best for all, what certainly will be the best for our mother's health, and that should cover all regrets. Besides, I am sure we shall succeed, — in making a living, at least. That is all we could have hoped to do if we had stayed in town."

"I don't know. Nobody can guess how I hated to give up my art class! The Professor said I would certainly make a name for myself if I kept on."

"Why, Belle! I did not dream you felt so blue



about this change! And I should like to know what is to hinder your 'making a name' for yourself here as well as there? Don't all the artists, the landscape ones anyway, go into the country to study? And as for portraits, where can you find more original models than along these country lanes? If you have enough rudimentary knowledge, and talent, to make your teacher express himself like that, you ought to be ashamed of yourself if you can't conquer the rest!"

"H'm-m. Since when did you become philosopher?"

"No matter. You have always laughed at my 'poetical talent;' Bonny has not. But I tell you that if there is any real poetry in me, so real that it must find expression, it will find it here just as certainly as if I were to spend my days in study and all my evenings scribbling verses."

"Then you disparage education?"

"I begin to think there are different sorts of education. One kind I am going to attempt is learning the land. I will have to begin at the A B C of it, just as I did in reading printed stuff. But the earth is printed, too, and by a Hand that does nothing in vain. Most boys run



away from the country because there is no money in it. I am going to hunt for something which will beat money."

"Youth! my brother! Just youth. After a while I suppose you will find, as old Dollo-way says, that 'money beats sentiment.'"

"Yes — and malaria beats both! I've been warned against too much night-dew, if I want to keep my health."

"Why, isn't this a healthful place?" cried Isabelle, in quick alarm. "If it is n't we should never have brought Mother here!"

"It is. Mr. Brook is eighty years old, and he has lived here almost all his life. But he spoke to me about our being careful, particularly at first. He said, and truly, that our health is our capital; and that if we use reasonable precaution we shall never suffer."

"Well, I know now that you have grown wise! I cannot remember when I ever heard you mention health as a thing to be guarded, — our health, I mean. You have been solicitous enough about Mother's, except —"

"Except in what? Don't throw cold water on me now, after warming my vanity like that!"

"Except when you gave up your situations so readily, because your 'boss' 'sassed' you!"



“I think it’s time to go in, Isabelle.”

“So do I. I could n’t have supported any more wise remarks! They sound so — so un-Roland like.”

“Hark! There’s Bonny calling. Mother and the ‘Hopeful’ have probably come down to the ‘peace-room.’ And, do you know I think that’s a mighty pretty fancy of hers? Let’s try to please her and remember it.”

“All right. I’ll try; but I’m not a bit perfect!”

Roland forbore the retort that rose to his lip. Just at present he was still in the first glow of his incipient manhood, when the idea of being the “head of the family” had a charm of pride and importance about it that made trifles of heavy burdens. Isabelle wondered how long his ease-loving temperament would endure the strain of actual labor and hardship which would inevitably be laid upon it; but still, like Beatrice, she saw a change in Roland, and she could but believe that he had “come unto his own” in coming to dwell in the wide, beautiful country.

“Well, you dreamers! Here have Motherkin and the bad ones been sitting for full five minutes, waiting for you to come in. We are to hold a conclave of forces and decide upon the



tactics of this camp! Hi! there! brother Bob! Does that sound warlike enough for you? I motion Mother takes the Chair! All in favor — Aye!”

“My daughter, I decline all posts purely honorary! You may be Chairman of the occasion; for whether we will or no, you will be bound to have the most to say!”

“Now, Motherkin! But Roland knows, as well as I, what we have thought. Let him tell our plans, and if they agree with yours, all right; if not, we’ll hear whatever amendments the house has to offer.”

“What you talkin’ ’bout?” asked Robert, sleepily.

“Exactly. Roland, begin, please.”

“Where?”

“On the money question, of course.”

“Well, the first expense we shall have to meet is for garden tools and some sort of a wagon. Mr. Brook has an old horse for which he has little use, and he will be glad to have us use it for a while, and pay him nothing but its keep.”

“My son, we must try to stand upon our own feet. We are not to depend upon Mr. Brook as if *we* had no independence at all. There is a small sum of money, you know, — a few hundred dol-



lars. We are to use all of it that is necessary in making this experiment a success. Go on, dear."

"As much as is necessary, Motherkin, but no more. This is no especial benevolence on our patron's part. He is as good and generous as he can be, but he is also wise. He wants us to keep our self-respect and his, at the same time. Well, this way of getting the use of a horse is quite common among country people. I have inquired and satisfied myself that it is so. He hasn't a cow to work for its keep, so that we shall have to buy. But —"

"Oh, Roland, you are so slow! Listen to me, Motherkin! I, Beatrice Beckwith, who never earned a penny in her life — but once, a flower-girling! — am going to be one of the bread-winners! True, true, true!"

"Why, Bonny! what do you mean? And how happy you seem!"

"Well, I should think I am happy! Wasn't I the very bottom and beginning of this whole country business? Didn't I go a talking to my dear old gentleman, and didn't he fall in with the country notion, hot foot? Then it rests on me to make the thing a 'go;' and I mean to do it."

"It rests upon us all equally, Beatrice."

"Well, I have a situation. I am a private



secretary, if you please!—I mean, if you will please! That was why I was so anxious to shorten up the music practice and take the other lessons at the Y. W. C. A. rooms during the last three months. Mr. Brook divulged the scheme to me in one of his letters, which you did n't ask to see and I did n't offer to show you. And we have kept it a secret from you on purpose to be a delightful surprise to you now. I am to have a dollar a day for my services. Think of that! I, the harum-scarum, am going to settle down into a regular money-grubber."

"Why does he need a private secretary?" demanded Isabelle, rather anxiously.

"To help him put his collection of bugs and things into shape. You must know that our Mr. Chidly Brook is a known naturalist,—the one whose papers we have liked so much, over the signature of 'Windsor.'"

"Is it possible?"

"True. He is the most modest of men, though, and he never speaks of his work as anything but insignificant. However, he has been appealed to, on behalf of some museum in Boston, to allow them to buy his collection when he has done with it. Of course, he is n't going to do that; he will give it to them, instead; but he is going to put it



into first-class order first, as if it weren't now ! and I am to make catalogues, take down notes, do anything and everything which will aid him. Now — don't all speak at once ! ”

The mother opened her lips to express her praise, but her first words were drowned in a series of knockings as sudden as imperative.

“ Rat-a-tat-tat ! Tum-tum-tum ! ”

“ For goodness' sake ! Who can be coming to visit us ! At this hour, too ! ”

But when Roland reached the door and opened it, there was not a person to be seen. The moonlight fell in a broad sheet across the threshold and illuminated the sloping lawn before it.

“ Rat-a-tat-tat ! ”

The sounds came from that side of the house. There was no doubting that, and Bonny joined her brother in the search.

But though they tried both front and rear doors, even the little side porch which led to the eastern rooms, there was no intruder visible, and they returned to the place they had left, only to hear the strange summons repeated almost continually for a full half-hour ; after which, too disturbed to discuss their plans any further that night, the elder brother lifted the sleeping Robert from his corner of the hearth-rug, and followed the rest upstairs.



All night, at varying intervals, the uncanny rappings were repeated, till even the sensible mother began to feel that there was something supernatural about them, and to speculate if this were the reason that the former residents had found the house unsuitable and vacated it in such disgust.

But Roland sighed for a gun ; and at midnight, arming himself with a fishing-rod and a broom, he determined to descend to the “peace-room” and stand guard till morning.

There, presently, the weary lad went sound asleep ; to awake startled by the apparition of a white-clad figure before him, and to hear the sibilant whisper, “How — do — you — like — to — live — in — a — haunted — house ?”



## CHAPTER XI.

MISS JOANNA.

“OH! did I frighten you? Don't — for mercy's sake! don't hit me! Why — it's I — Bonny!”

“Well! I should think you might be better employed! Why didn't you stay in your own room?”

“Could n't sleep. Why didn't you?”

“Same reason. Besides, if the household is in danger I am the one to defend it. Go to bed.”

“I am the one to help you. Are n't you glad we did n't try to sleep over here alone, as we wanted to? I wonder if Mr. Brook knows anything about this! He would not allow us, do you remember? He said we would be more comfortable at their home, even after we had gotten the beds set up.”

“I do not think he knew. I am sure if he did he would have warned us. Hark! There it goes again! It is — it certainly is just by that west door. It sounds as if it came from the earth.”



“It sounds as if it came from everywhere.

‘Black spirits and white  
Red spirits and gray’ —

Oh ! How my flesh creeps ! Is n’t it a perfectly delightfully thrilling sensation ?

I have had dreams, but not of this,  
That I should share the wondrous bliss  
Of meeting ghostses in the air,  
And have them set on end my hair —

That last line is rather faulty. It’s lost a foot or a leg — Oh, my ! Hark !”

“Bonny !”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Who is down there with you ?”

“Nobody. I’m down here with Roland. The honor of this exploit is his.”

“Come up to bed, both of you. You’ll take cold.”

“Oh ! we’re all gooseflesh now, both of us. But Roland is dressed, and so am I ; that is — partly.”

“We can do nothing about this matter to-night. I will see Mr. Brook to-morrow and get an explanation. Else we will make a business of investigation for ourselves. Come, both of you, at once.”



“Motherkin’s voice sounds kind of chattery, too, does n’t it? But we had better mind her promptly. Good-night.”

“What’s the use of going to bed, Mother? Cannot I sit up?” pleaded Roland, as he reached the upper landing of the stairs.

“You will be asleep in five minutes, if you make up your mind to it. The noises have continued now for some hours, and nobody is the worse for them. Good-night.”

It was a rather serious party which gathered about the breakfast-table, for even to nineteenth-century folk the idea of living in a “haunted house” had its drawbacks. But as nothing had been known of the night’s disturbance by little Robert, nothing was now mentioned in his presence, and the talk took up again the interrupted “division of labor.”

“Roland is to be the farmer, of course. He is to raise as much as he can in his little greenhouse, or cold frame it will be this spring. Oh! I forgot, I did n’t mean to tell his part for him. Fire ahead yourself, Roland!”

“For a young lady who has been promoted to a private secretaryship, you are not over-choice in your language, Beatrice.”

“Excuse me, Motherkin, I’ll try. But it



seems so long to wait before you know all we have thought out."

"Yes," said Roland, "our friends think I can sell a good deal of green stuff. Mr. Brook has lent me lots of books on 'gardening for profit,' and his gardener has told me more. He, the gardener, has offered to teach me by overseeing my work, and I shall be very grateful to him."

"He's a cranky old soul, Mother. I wonder Roland has the patience to endure his 'you musts' and 'you must nots;' I could n't."

"No, I should expect little endurance from you — in the patience line, my daughter. That's your rock of stumbling."

"Never you mind, Mother. I'm going to blast it out of the way with the dynamite of hard work. See if I don't! Proceed, Roland."

"Miss Joanna says that in such a busy household even the youngest is sure to want to do something; so what do you think she has planned for you, Bob?"

"I dunno. I — I ain't sufferin' ter do no work. I — I'd ruther fish an' go swimmin'."

"Yes; but this is a co-operative establishment. Every member must contribute something to the general support. Your share is to be — eggs!"



“Eggs! I ain’t no hen. I can’t lay no eggs, can I?”

“You can study grammar and take care of poultry at the same time. Miss Brook has a famous stock of poultry. It is one of her amusements; but she is going to start you off with a few ordinary fowls, and see how you manage them. Then, if you are industrious, after you have paid for the first ones, she will let you have a better lot. I am to repair the old poultry-house, down at the foot of the barnyard, and you are to do the rest. I suppose, at first, mother would be as willing to buy her eggs and chickens of you as of anybody else. What do you say?”

“I say — I say — I dunno. I — well, I guess I’ll let her.”

“See here, ‘Humpty-Dump’! It just begins to dawn upon me that you are a spoiled child. Mr. Dolloway has remarked so several times, and I have indignantly denied it. I hope you will be a little gentleman to Miss Brook, no matter whether your business ideas differ from hers or not. She is coming here very soon, and I don’t want her to think my Bob is anything less perfect than I have painted him.”

“H’m-m. Don’t that Mr. Dolloway man live to her house?”



“Yes; certainly. Why?”

“Then they ain’t no use. He’s told her the hull cat an’ checker-board story ’fore this time. I guess I won’t need to bother an’ behave no diff’runt from every day. She would n’t believe me if I did. She’d be a ’spectin’ I’d do some-thin’ naughty all the time. She would n’t have no conf’dunce in a feller after that man has talked to her.”

“Pooh! Is that all the courage you have? If I were you I’d show her that the old gentleman was mistaken. I’d take her chickens an’ say, ‘Thank you.’ I’d set every mother biddy on a pile of fresh eggs, and I’d have little downy chickens running all around. I’d teach the hens to respect me and come to me every time I called them; and I’d make my Motherkin think she had the smartest little boy in Orange County, which is where you live now, my dear!”

“Is it? Would you, Bon?”

“I would!”

“Wull — wull — I guess you’re ’most always square. An’ I will. I’ll let Miss Brook be good ter me if she wants ter.”

“Magnanimous soul! Now, Isabelle. I—I dread to glance your way.”



“Why? I thought that Roland was going to tell us the rest of the planning. You are a great monopolist, Bonny.”

“I am silent; I say no more.”

“Well, Roland? What is my share?”

“You are to be housekeeper. To stay with mother and take the home-work from her hands.”

There was a moment of really anxious waiting. “Bonny has always been the house-worker,” said the elder girl, at length. “Why should she not continue and let me go as secretary to Mr. Brook? I took a course of typewriting before she did, if you’ll remember. I don’t like housework, and I shall make a botch of it. I shall worry mother more than help her.”

“I wish I could do both!” cried Beatrice, with her impulsive generosity. “And I can, some of it. You hate dish-washing the worst of any part. Well, leave the dishes till I get home at night and I will do them then. So you can get more time for your painting.”

Mrs. Beckwith said nothing. She waited to let the two settle the matter between themselves if they could; but she was quite ready with the decisive word should it need to be spoken.

“No; we must be more fair than that. If



you do the housework I must do the writing; or *vice versa*. I do not see what difference it makes, why he should mind the change; and you keep mother in better spirits than I do."

Bonny opened her lips, blushed, and said nothing. Yet Roland came to her aid very promptly. He loved both of his sisters better than many lads would have been willing to confess, but Bonny was his other self. Though they were always bandying jests with each other, they had never had a really angry word. Isabelle, while being far more ladylike and quiet, was also much more selfish; and Roland had suffered from this fault of hers more than once. He was not sorry, therefore, to be able to defend his favorite and discipline Belle at the same time. "I'll tell you what difference it makes. Mr. Brook loves Bonny best. Yes, he has told me that he really loves her. They have a community of tastes. You know she was always fond of studying natural history when she had a chance, and when people are *en rapport* it makes everything else easy. With you it would be a real task for him to dictate and direct. It would be just as hard for you. But with Bonny it will seem almost like play,—to him, at least. I only hope he won't keep my sister too long at her work. He may



forget that she is not as enthusiastic as himself."

"But —" began Isabelle.

"But — Mr. Brook has made his own choice. We owe him for much kindness. There is nothing more to be said about it," said Mrs. Beckwith, rising. "Here comes a lady walking. Is it your 'Miss Joanna,' children?"

"Yes, oh! yes! Look at her, before she spies us watching. Isn't she a sweet old lady? Isn't she the lady of your chrysanthemum dream?"

Over the lawn where the grass was just springing into greenness came the tall, graceful figure, which despite its seventy-odd years was still as straight as Isabelle's, who, looking curiously, remembered her brother's words of the evening before, "If you want models, where can you find them better than here?"

Ah! indeed, Miss Joanna would be a model fit to inspire a genius! Her face was like the tint of a late blush rose, frost-faded. Her eyes were dark, her mouth firm and sweet, and her snowy hair, parted on either side her temples, framed them in silver. On her head she wore a big gray hat, tied primly under her chin, and over the soft gray morning-gown a shawl of the same









“WULL, BE YOU THE EGG WOMAN?”



neutral tint, which clothed — not hung upon — her shoulders. But it was the expression of her countenance that captivated them all, even the matter-of-fact Robert.

Mindful of past advice, the youngster slipped down from his place, set the door wide, and advancing held out his crumby hand. "Wull, be you the egg woman? I'm very glad to see you. Come right in. We've just done eatin' breakfas'. This is Motherkin, an' these is the rest of us."

"You are Robert! No need to tell me that!" responded the visitor, smiling, and not refusing the proffered handshake, though she looked regretfully at her soiled glove the second afterward. "I have heard of you, and the pleasure of acquaintance is mutual. Good morning, Mrs. Beckwith — Isabelle — Roland, and my girl. I hope you have rested well."

"Good morning. Will you sit down here, or come into the other room? My Beatrice has scarcely told us which is 'best-room' as yet. They all seem so fine and comfortable to us."

"I'm glad of that. I was afraid you might find them small; but it does indeed look very bright and cheery. Anywhere; here, if you like.



We are so very glad to have you for neighbors, I could not defer any longer to come and bid you welcome. Does the house please you?"

"It pleases me perfectly. But, since you ask if we rested well, I must tell you our strange experience;" and she very briefly narrated the unaccountable knockings.

Miss Brook listened curiously, with the utmost astonishment depicted on her countenance. The current of her thoughts was not particularly flattering to Mrs. Beckwith's common-sense, had it been known, but of course it was not; nor did anybody observe the interest with which Robert received his first intimation of what had occurred.

"Well, I have never heard anything like it, and, of a certainty, it must have some rational explanation. What that may be we will find as soon as possible."

"Now, Miss Brook, do let us believe it's haunted!" cried Bonny, coaxingly. "It's so delightful and uncommon in America. I feel just like a heroine this morning."

"You look like one, my dear, with those shining eyes and pink cheeks. You may be tired, but you are physically better than when you came a week ago. But ghosts! Oh, no! we have no ghosts in New Windsor."



“Still they’re so inspiring!” said Bonny, with a comical glance at Roland.

“Yes, dear Miss Joanna, will you believe that my matter-of-fact sister came down into the dining-room in the middle of the night, listened to the ‘rappings,’ and immediately burst into rhyme? Shall I repeat, Beatrice?”

“At the peril of your life! Beg pardon, Miss Brook. I will not talk any more, at present.”

“I like to hear you, my child, I like to hear you. It does old ears good to listen to youthful chatter. I’m sure it’s better than hearing much that is said which may be more sensible.”

Everybody smiled, Bonny most demurely; and the mother understood at once what was the bond of sympathy between these two bright maidens,—one at the end of life, the other at its beginning. “I think, my dear, that you have been charmingly answered. But, Miss Brook, what do you imagine to be the cause of our disturbance? Have you any theory?”

“No, none. I am not a theoretical person. I leave all that to my brother. However, I’ll send a man over to help Roland look about. Master Robert, I suppose that your brother has mentioned to you my plan for your helping the others of this self-helpful family, has he not?”



“What, ma’am?” asked the little boy, quite at a loss to understand.

“Oh, I forget! I am not used to talking with small people. Has Roland told you about the hens?”

“Yes, ’m. When can I have ’em?”

“Just as soon as the poultry-house is repaired, and the pickets on the fence. It will not do for them to run about anywhere they please, for that would be to ruin this fine garden that is to be.”

“But there are few seeds in it yet, Miss Brook. Will it make any difference so?”

“Yes, my farmer. If the hens are not trained as they should be in the beginning, they will certainly go astray; in which they are exactly like little boys—and gray-haired girls,” said Miss Joanna, smiling down upon the small lad, who had remained close beside her from the moment of her arrival, but who seemed neither to disturb her nor to wish to do so; which, to his family, was inexplicable.

“Let’s go see how much will have to be ’paired. Will you?”

“With pleasure, if your mother is willing.”

“Oh, she don’t care, do you, Motherkin? ’ness we break our necks.”

“I do not intend to break mine. I haven’t



done with it yet," returned Miss Brook gayly, and left the house with her crisp, clean step, that somehow made Beatrice think of everything pure and sweet.

"Is n't she lovely, Mother? Here, let me get your bonnet and you go with them. It will be safer, on Bob's account, and you are to begin this very morning to take the doctor's prescription, 'Live out of doors all that you can.' Here is a hat, dear, — no matter if it is mine; and I declare you are almost as pretty as — Miss Joanna."

"You sauce-box! You deserve that I should not kiss you! But I will. How delightful the air is! How good it is to be here!" Mrs. Beckwith's careworn face lighted with glad thanksgiving, and with a wave of her hand to her daughters on the wide porch she stepped briskly down the path her guest had followed.

But she had not gone more than a dozen yards when her feet were arrested by Robert's shrill cry; a cry of such distress and fear that her heart stood still in dread. Then, mindless of physician's orders, she bounded forward frantically. "The river — I'm sure he's drowned!"



## CHAPTER XII.

### BITS OF NATURAL HISTORY.

“ **R**OBERT! where are you?”  
“ H-he-re, Moth-er!”

“Here” proved to be upon the sloping roof of the little poultry-house, where the child looked safe and rather ridiculous in his fright; and relieved of one anxiety, Mrs. Beckwith passed through the building toward the yard beyond in pursuit of Miss Brook.

“Why, what is the matter?”

“Snakes! That’s all. A nest of black snakes. I’m trying to kill them.” Miss Joanna was, indeed, laying about her lustily with a heavy stick she had seized, and her delicate face was flushed with excitement.

“But they’ll bite you! My dear madam, do come away!” Poor Mrs. Beckwith herself was thrilled with fear, as her eyes fell upon the tangle of writhing, sinuous creatures to whom her neighbor was dealing destruction so vigorously.

“Oh, no, indeed! Not until I have made an end of them! Robby was terribly frightened,



though he had no cause to be. I've finished two, I'll have done presently. There! don't let that one get away, please!"

The reptile was crawling sluggishly toward the spot where Mrs. Beckwith stood, and, with a scream that closely resembled her son's, she leaped aside and retreated through the doorway.

Miss Joanna looked up in unfeigned surprise, and for a moment relaxed her murderous labor.

"Why, are you afraid of these creatures?"

"Af-ra-id! Of course — I am!"

"They are harmless. You need not be."

"Harmless! Why, then —"

"Do I destroy them? My statement must be qualified. They can hurt no person and they are timid; but they infest poultry-houses, steal eggs, make trouble in the dairy, and altogether accomplish so much more injury than benefit to a household that I think them best dead. My brother would not agree with me. He says they pay for their depredations by ridding us of meaner creatures. He would be quite distressed at my present action; only —" And the lady laughed lightly. "He has already as large a collection of reptiles as he should have. The sight of them terrifies nearly everybody, as these have you."

The city woman could scarce believe her own



ears; that anybody occupied as Miss Brook was at that moment could go on complacently giving a dissertation on the merits and demerits of so obnoxious an animal was amazing. Finally she found voice to inquire, "Are they plentiful here-about?"

"Oh! yes. But these are the first I have seen this spring," answered Miss Joanna, cheerfully. "I am always glad for one reason to meet my first snake. I'm pretty sure of warm weather coming. These have just crawled out of their winter quarters, somewhere near, and have been sunning themselves in this shallow pool of water. If they had been in usual activity, I should have had a chase to capture them. Poor things! that's the end."

"Be they all dead, every single one?" demanded Robert from his slippery perch.

"I think so; you can come down now."

He did so rather gingerly, lifting his feet very high when he stepped upon the moist earth of the poultry yard, and almost expecting to see a small head arise beneath his every footprint. "You're a awful funny lady, Miss Brook."

"Why so, dear?" asked that person, continuing her examination of the place and mentally determining the cost of the needed repairs.



“’Cause you’re sorry for things, yet you keep on a killin’ ’em, an’ ’cause you ain’t afraid of snakes. I never saw any before, ’cept up to the park, in the menagerie. I—I—” He paused, looked anxiously toward his mother, thrust his hands in his pockets, turned quite red in the face, and finally blurted out: “I ain’t a goin’ to keep no hen things, I ain’t.”

“Why, Robert!” and “Why, Robert?” fell from both women’s lips at the same instant.

“Because, an’ — ’cause, I—I know it sounds awful cowardy, but I don’t like snakes, an’ there ain’t no use pertendin’ I do. I would n’t dast to come here alone.”

“Is it possible! The boy who boasts he is afraid of nothing!”

“Wull — wull — you see. Why, Mother, you’re afraid yourself! You must know how it seems. If one should bite your little boy, how dretful bad you’d feel! Would n’t you?”

“I suppose I should. But Miss Brook has just told us that these snakes are harmless. And I am not a boy. I’m only a woman, you know.”

“That’s so. Wull—I—I s’pose I will. I said I would, an’ I ain’t a goin’ to lie, nohow.”

“That is right! That is fine!” cried Miss Joanna, impulsively. “A little lad who has a



love of the truth so strong that it will overcome personal fear is the sort of boy for me!" Then she went on to explain so clearly to the child all the habits of the hated reptiles now lying dead in the yard of Robert's "own poultry-house" that he became intensely interested.

"Wull, if a snake, just a nasty black snake, has got such a lot of int'rusting things about it, I s'pose rabbits an' such fellers must have a heap more. Don't they?"

"I should say they did! And you must ask my brother all about any sort of living creature you wish to become acquainted with, and he will be delighted to tell you. He is a very wise man, for all he is so quiet about it."

"Does he know 'bout hens?"

"Everything, I fancy, though he likes snakes better. Wild things are more to his notion than tame ones. Now I am ready to tell your big brother just what must be done here, and if he can manage to get the place fixed to-day you can begin your poultry business to-morrow. Now is just the time to make a pleasant and profitable commencement."

"Why?"

"Because it is 'sitting time.' Every mother biddy in the flock, or nearly every one, is now



thinking about her coming family, and wanting to 'sit.' ”

“Does hens think?”

“My son, you must not tire Miss Brook with your questions. Ask some of us, who understand you better; and we will try to answer, as wisely as we know, though I begin to think our ignorance is mountainous, about country life at least.”

“No, no; I beg, dear Mrs. Beckwith! Don't discourage inquisitiveness of this sort, not on my account. I am a lonely old woman who will be as glad to answer questions as a genuine boy is to ask them. I like it, please.”

The mother smiled gratefully. As for Robert, he slipped his hand again into his new friend's, and looked up into her face encouragingly. “That's a nice lady! And I'll be good; I'll ask you every single thing I can think of.”

Before that summer was over it seemed to poor Miss Joanna that he had fully redeemed his word; and yet the days on which this living interrogation point was out of her sight grew to be the loneliest days the gentle old lady knew.

Mr. Brook was as much at a loss to understand the mysterious rappings that had so disturbed his new tenants' peace during their first night at The



Lindens, as was anybody else ; but he set himself to examine every part of the house and grounds, and, like his sister, declared his faith in a rational explanation of the occurrence.

It was left to Mr. Dolloway to solve the riddle. He had, to Mrs. Beckwith's relief and Robert's disgust, declared his intention of passing the following night in the old house, and, should the disturbing noises be repeated, searching for the cause till he found it. In his own words: "I'll find the spirits or I'll be a spirit myself!"

"That sounds large and reassuring, does n't it!" remarked Bonny to Belle. "I can imagine Mr. Dolloway in the condition of hunger necessary to make him 'spiritual.' For his sake and our own, I hope success will crown his efforts before he gets to the verge of starvation."

The evening passed without any "manifestations." Roland twanged his banjo for the amusement of their self-invited guest, Isabelle brought out her portfolio of drawings, Beatrice made character sketches of the different persons present, and so aptly that Robert remained in a hilarious condition that precluded his feeling any of the fear he had expected ; and by nine o'clock, tired out with another day of "settling," the whole family retired to their chambers.



Save and except Mr. Dolloway. "I will not lie down nor shut an eye, lad; there is n't any use of urging me. I've come over here to ferret out this thing, an' I'll ferret it wide awake an' dressed." With that he settled himself in the most comfortable chair in the room, put his feet upon the fender, and in five minutes was sound asleep.

Bonny heard his snores as she lay awake in her bed, and laughed; then she heard something which did not add to her mirth. She had brought the kitchen poker with her, and, armed thus valiantly, she rose and summoned Roland. "Let's be as still as mice, I think the rest are all asleep, and we'll steal a march on them and Brother Dolloway as well. Listen to him, will you? he quite out-rackets the 'spirits.'"

Mrs. Beckwith silently joined the company, and when the three met on the stairs, each expressed surprise that the other had not gone quietly to sleep as usual, and each was attired exactly as during the day. Mrs. Beckwith bore the traditional weapon of womankind, a broom; and when Belle added her presence to the others, she was likewise equipped.

At the door of the sitting-room somebody dropped her article of defence with such a



clatter that Mr. Dalloway sprang from his chair, angrily demanding: "What in the world do you mean coming into a man's room in this way, without warning?" Then recollecting himself, he laughed at his own blunder, and changed his question to, "Why did you get up when there has been no rapping?"

"But, excuse me, there has been rapping, even louder than last night," responded Beatrice, shivering a little.

"What's that? Haven't I been here all the time? If the thumps had come don't you s'pose I'd 'a' heard 'em?"

"Possibly you fell asleep."

"Fell asleep! H'm-m. When I set out to watch, I watch!"

"But —"

Rat-a-tat, a-tat! The unseen disturbers of the peace interfered to prevent any further misunderstanding between the volunteer protector and the protected.

Mr. Dalloway held up his hand for silence. Again the sounds were repeated, this time with redoubled force it seemed to the strained ears of the listeners.

The next they knew the old man was back in his armchair, laughing violently and swaying to



and fro in his paroxysm of mirth. "Ha, ha, ha! That's the best joke I ever heard, the very best. And to think Mr. Brook himself didn't guess at it!"

"Well, but what is it?"

"Don't you know? Hark!"

Even Mrs. Beckwith began to lose patience with what seemed to her ill-timed mirth, and replied with conviction, "Of course we do not know or we should have disturbed nobody to inform us."

"Your pardon, ma'am. I really s'pose you don't know, bein' brought up in the city, so to speak. Well, ma'am, my opinion o' them sounds is: what master would call *mephitis*, what common folks name — skunks."

Nobody said anything for a moment; and seeing the look of astonishment upon the faces about him, as well as hearing the "thump, thump," continued, Mr. Dolloway explained: "The *mephitis* — I learn my names from Mr. Brook, because he says the other ones are 'local,' an' not spoke everywhere, — the *mephitis* is a burrowin' animal. They was a nest of snakes woke up in the hen-yard, Miss Brook told me this morning, and they's a nest of the other fellows woke up under your door-sill, or, maybe, under that big flat



stun used for a step. The noise is made by their tails a flap-flap-flapping against the hard ground or sunthin'. They won't do any harm there till morning, and then I'll get the men to have 'em roused out. They'll have to be shot; an' now you all might as well go to bed again."

"Will not you go upstairs, too, Mr. Dolloway? There is an extra room, you know; and I should feel proud to be able to entertain anybody over night, after having to economize space as I did in our 'flat.'"

The guest consented, and everybody was soon asleep, satisfied that Mr. Dolloway's explanation was probably the correct one, unromantic as it proved to be.

"To think my 'haunt' turned out to be so perfectly horrid! It's cured me of superstition, anyway!" sighed Beatrice, as she kissed her mother good-night. "One by one my dreams forsake me; one by one —"

"You'd best get to bed as soon as possible."

"Oh, Motherkin! not even poetry allowed?"

"Not at this hour of the night, for working girls." And the candle was blown out.



## CHAPTER XIII.

### GETTING DOWN TO REALITIES.

“WELL, Mother dear, I’m off! Please wish me good luck!”

“I wish you patience and wisdom. These will bring the only sort of ‘luck’ worth having.”

“But I dread it so!”

“Why, Beatrice! Dread beginning your work for Mr. Brook? I thought you were very happy about it.”

“So I am, in one way. I love him dearly already, I do, indeed. That is why I shall feel so anxious to please him exactly; and since I have been with him more I find he is rather — well, sort of — um-m — particular, you know! And I — I never could do anything alike twice. I’m excellent for spurts of energy and hap-hazard industry, but the regular, day-after-day, early-in-the-morning, late-at-night kind is what will try my soul.”

“And Isabelle is grieving herself half-sick over the ‘drudgery’ of housework! After all, I wish



that our good friend had not been quite so explicit in his desires; for you don't object to what tries Belle's spirits, and she could do the mechanical part of your labor as well as you; the type-writing and note-taking, I mean."

"Well, dear, it can't be helped. Even you, I fancy, don't find country housekeeping quite a picnic. It's so much easier to run to the corner bakery for a loaf of bread than to make it one's self. Oh! your girl has seen that wrinkly look come on your face, Motherkin, lots of times during this last week; and — Dear, are you sorry we came?"

"No, — no, indeed! Not in the least. I am foolishly sorry that I cannot make everything smooth for you all. It is up-hill work getting into a settled way of living; but the Beckwiths 'never say die,' and a little more patience is all any of us need, except Roland. He, it seems to me, is in no want of more. He is an example to me, and a revelation. He, certainly, has found his right place; and it should be all the reward any of his womenkind could desire to know that. I never saw a love of the country and all appertaining to it so marked in anybody. Listen to him now, whistling away! He has broken his plough; but instead of losing his temper over it he has gone



to work to 'tinker' it up the best he can. And his poor hands, unused to manual labor, are blistered so that it must give him physical pain every time he touches anything. Oh, no, I cannot be sorry that we came."

"Bless the dear old Laureate! I'll pattern after him if I can. But — it is n't all rose-color, is it?"

"Sit down here one moment; you have five to spare. I want to remind you that though our Mr. Brook is so delightful and seems so young, he is still an old, old man. Be very gentle with him, even if he should get impatient and say sharp things to you. I do not know that he will; I only suggest what is liable to happen. Will you try to put your own impatience out of the question, dear?"

"I'll leave it at home with you, Motherkin. I'll be perfectly angelic, if I can. And I'm going to say, 'A dollar a day, six dollars a week!' to myself, continually. That's going to be my rock of salvation, Motherkin! Six dollars a week for a whole year will be over three hundred dollars toward our home! And we're all agreed on that. We all look forward to the day when we can go to Mr. Brook and say, 'Please, sir, we'd like to buy The Lindens!' Oh! I'm not



afraid now; and I'm getting as mercenary as a Jew."

"H'm-m! No comparisons. And I foresee that the money part will soon be the last in your mind as connected with your labor. However, time's up! Off with you!"

"One moment more, Motherkin. What are you doing with that thing?"

"It is a rude little frame I tacked together to fade some embroidery silk upon."

"Fade silk? Why?"

"Because I have none of the right shade for the work I have in hand; so the sunshine is to help me out. I will wind the threads from these spools about the frame, then place it in the sunshine — by that south window, I think — till it pales to the right tint."

"H'm-m! If I could only run into the art store and buy you the right sort without all this trouble!"

"I'd rather have this fine light for my task than anything out of the art store, dearie. And I am so much stronger than when I came, a week ago."

"Really stronger, Motherkin darling?"

"Really stronger, sweetheart."

"That's glorious! Away goes my silly regret



for the things that were! And that thought will make me able to laugh inside, if I dare not outside, should my 'master' seem stern or hard to please."

"Don't go to the opposite extreme. Mr. Brook will never be harsh, or even 'stern,' I fancy, with you. But your ignorance concerning what is so simple to him may try his patience. That's all. Now I must go to Belle. Have you seen Robert lately?"

"Not since breakfast."

"He is very quiet somewhere."

"Then of course he's in mischief. But he'll come out all right; he always does, you know. Good-by." Off she ran, trilling in her rich young voice the first bars of "Edinboro Toon;" and Mrs. Beckwith rose with a smile to seek her other, less light-hearted daughter.

Belle stood over the kitchen sink, her sleeves pushed above elbows far too white and dainty, as she herself thought, to be plunged in a deep pan of hot suds, and with a "mop" was trying to wash the morning's cups and saucers without touching her hands to the detested water. Her expression was so lugubrious that, despite a sincere sympathy, the mother could scarce repress a smile, and the girl faced about just in time to



catch the amused expression and to guess at its cause. A sudden burst of tears followed, and Mrs. Beckwith was at her daughter's side instantly.

"My poor, misguided child! Don't, I beg of you, allow yourself to weep over—a pan of soiled dishes!"

"As Bonny would say, I'll spoil the water! Is that it, Mother?" cried Belle, beginning to laugh almost hysterically.

"Because it is so unworthy of you, my artist."

"Artist! This looks like it, does n't it?"

"Exactly like it. It is your very finely strung nature which makes these trivial trials so distasteful to you. It is n't laziness or selfishness or vanity; no, I am sure it is not."

Belle dropped the wooden-handled dish-cloth with a splash, and gazed at her mother in astonishment. "Why—Mother! Did—you—think it was?"

"No, darling, I did not. Others might think so."

"Motherkin, I—hate it!"

"You must kill the hatred."

"I can't; it's born in me."

"Unfortunately, it is the fault of my mistaken training."



“No, no, no. Please don’t say that. I am ashamed of it, but I can’t help it.”

“A girl who has the talent, nay, more, the genius, that you have is too strong a person to say that, mentally too strong.”

“Mother, if I am talented, as you flatter me by saying —”

“I never flatter, dear. Flattery is untruth.”

“Well, if I have talent isn’t it wasted here?”

“I think not. I have never had patience with the theory that geniuses should be exempt from the general burdens of life. The greater the intelligence the greater the endurance and courage should be. I don’t believe the dear Lord ever made a nature lop-sided; though there are so many lop-sided folks in the world, it sometimes seems so.”

“Tell me what you mean, Mother. I don’t want to be a kill-joy in the family, but I felt five minutes ago as if I were ready to give up life, if it were to be all—housework!”

Mrs. Beckwith began unwinding her spools of silk and rewinding them on her rude frame preparatory to the bleaching process, and Isabelle watched her curiously.

“I think it is this way. A body has one characteristic more marked than another; and



straightway his or her mistaken friends set about developing it to the detriment of all the other characteristics, which being less pronounced are left without training and cultivation till they really become insignificant. We were in danger of just that for you, but dish-washing happened in time to prevent. That 'hated' task will make you a symmetrical and noble woman, my Belle, mentally, as you bid fair to become physically."

"Mother, you are the dearest, oddest little reasoner in the world!"

"Thank you. But let's look at this matter practically. Is there not some way by which you can lessen the distastefulness of your task? Can you not study nature, landscape 'effects,' at the same time, or learn something of your favorite authors?"

"I see no way. That is why — one why — it is disagreeable. I am here in the midst of a lovely country, but if I do the housework as it should be, as Miss Brook assures me it should be, I shall have no time for anything else."

"There you go again, twisting your mind out of balance toward the other side. If I were you, I would certainly combine art with dish-washing and literature with my other domestic duties. You can, easily."



"Please tell me," begged Isabelle, now interested and smiling, and in this new mood forgetting to take account of her hands otherwise than that they fulfilled their present task well.

"That window over the sink looks out upon as lovely a bit of country as God ever made. Now, suppose you take a large sheet of wrapping-paper and cover the lower sash before which you stand, leaving out the size of one pane. Then through that loop-hole, as it were, do your studying. Take the foliage, as it expands. Note the different tones and shades of green; the forms of the young buds, their manner of growth from the first appearing to the full perfection. It seems to me that will give you a knowledge of detail which will help you wonderfully in your 'technique' when you come to put your brush to canvas. So with the cloud and sky tints; they are never-ending in variety. I would keep a little note-book beside me and jot down the colors your studies suggest to you; then when you have leisure verify these suggestions by actual trial. You can vary your outlook continually, and I think you will become so interested in the experiment that you will acquire the other knowledge—of how to despatch the dish-washing neatly and rapidly—without thinking much about it."



Belle mused for a few moments ; her face softening under the conviction that she would not thus be debarred from all connection with the one sort of labor she had heretofore loved. Then she asked : " You said literature, too. How can I read while about the house ? "

" This way. Have a wide piece sewn across the bottom of your gingham aprons, with pockets stitched in it ; and in these pockets carry one of your ' Handy Volume ' series or one of your art ' Primers. ' Take out your book from time to time and memorize anything which pleases you. You can thus, if you choose, gain more actual understanding of the world's best minds during one dinner-getting than during a class-hour at school. I know ; I've tried it myself. "

" Oh, Mother ! is that the way you came to know so many of the poets by heart ? "

" Yes, dearie, the very way. And the knowledge has been ' meat and drink ' to me many and many a time. When you were all small, and my darkest hours were upon me, I had to get right straight out of myself to enable me just to live. If I had dwelt upon my own hardships, I should have broken down physically long ago. But I just wouldn't. I said to these sweet singers and teachers : ' You must bear my burdens for me. "



God made you stronger than He made me, and I shall utilize you!’ The beauty of it was that they did support me, and lost no whit of strength themselves.”

“My set of poets is so nicely bound. They were my prizes at school, you know. If I had a cheaper edition — ”

“Darling, would you rather have a white book or a white soul?”

“Why, Motherkin!”

“Which?” asked Mrs. Beckwith, persistently, gently winding at her bits of skeins.

“The soul, of course. But — ”

“Ah, yes, I thought so. If I had an *edition de luxe*, even, of any author who had words of cheer for me, I would not hesitate to put it to the use I have suggested, — not for the twentieth part of a second. Oh! I could groan sometimes, over the books that are wasted by lying on library shelves unread, when there are so many hungry minds going unfed through life.”

Mrs. Beckwith had waxed enthusiastic, as was her wont when books were her subject; but she had succeeded in banishing the dolorous expression from her daughter’s face and the forebodings which had troubled her from her own mind. She rose and fastened her stretcher of silken thread



in the southern window, and then she went out, remarking: "It is time I looked after Robert. He has been ominously quiet ever since breakfast-time."

She sought him in the poultry-house, where, despite his fear of snakes, he passed much of his time watching the sitting hens with which Miss Brook had stocked his establishment. He repaired thither each morning with a firm belief that nature must work a miracle on his behalf, and that the ordinary three weeks of time required to change eggs into chickens would be shortened to one, "'cause no little boy ever wanted chicks so bad."

"Robert!" called the mother, entering the little house.

There was no reply.

"I wonder, would he disobey me and go fishing or swimming after he had promised not!"

One of the prospective mother biddies clucked loudly as if to suggest, "No strangers allowed!" and Mrs. Beckwith retreated.

Just outside the yard she met Mr. Dolloway. "Good-morning, ma'am. Where's that boy?"

"I'm looking for him now."

"H'm-m! I came to tell him he'd probably addled all them eggs a handling 'em so much,



and I'd brought him a few fresh ones. Yesterday he took a whole nest full and punched a pin-hole in 'em, to see the chicks inside. He's — he's a great one !”

Mr. Dolloway's tone betokened more amusement than anger, and Mrs. Beckwith eagerly exclaimed: “I was sure you would like my little son, after you understood him thoroughly.”

“H'm-m ! I defy anybody to do that, ma'am, — understand him, begging your pardon for my freedom. Ho — hello ! What — what — Look yonder !”

The mother wheeled about anxiously, and followed her neighbor's gaze houseward. There on the ridge-pole of the old roof sat the lad they sought. The house was three stories high in one part, but sloped downward to within a few feet of the ground on the “Revolutionary” side, after the fashion of buildings of that period. This long slope of roof was on the north, and almost directly below the eaves was the cistern, which for purposes of cleaning and repairing was that morning uncovered.

“Oh ! my boy ! if he should slip !”

“As he probably will.”

At that instant Robert stood up to examine the ancient weather-cock which had attracted



him to his perilous perch, and forgetting where he was began to twist the dingy "chanticleer" upon its rod.

Suddenly there was a rush, a cry — a sudden downward flash of knickerbockered legs, and "Humpty-Dumpty" had disappeared in the cistern.



## CHAPTER XIV.

### APIS MELLIFICA.

“GOOD-MORNING, my dear, good-morning. I am pleased to see you so punctual.”

Bonny looked up brightly. There was surely nothing stern or forbidding about the fine old face which smiled genially upon her from the museum window, and she was instantly ashamed of her earlier “dread” concerning the new task that day to be begun. “Good-morning, Mr. Brook. Of course I would be punctual this first day. The trouble will be to keep it up. I’m a lazy sort of a girl.”

“Humph! I’ve seen no evidence of it heretofore, and I shall not watch for faults. How is the good little mother this morning?”

“Well; really growing stronger, thank you. I have her own word for it.”

“Then we can get to work with a light heart. I’ve laid out a pile of it, I assure you. Like many other people who defer what they should not till over-late in life, now I’ve set myself the



task I am all impatience to get through it. Come in, please."

Beatrice knew the way well enough. Till that morning the great apartment had been a fascinating wonderland to her, with its rows of shelves and cases, each filled with creatures curious, ugly, or beautiful; and the thought that she was now to learn all about them in a business way did appear quite formidable. However, she reminded herself of her mother's frequent advice, "Take one thing at a time," and found comfort in the knowledge that she could write of only one insect at one instant. Collectively they might be something dreadful; individually they were poor little dried-up affairs!

Then her eye fell upon the table by the opposite window and her face brightened. "The typewriter! When did it come?"

"Last evening. The man brought it down from Newburgh and put it into working order for you. I am anxious to see you use it. He did so for a moment, but I did not like to detain him. It is a wonderful instrument, is it not?"

"I suppose so. Anyway I am very fond of using it." The girl sat down before the firm little table which the machine agent had prepared for her, and, placing a sheet of paper in position,



clicked off Mr. Brook's name and address with a rapidity and correctness which delighted him.

"Really, my dear! That is fine! If you can do as well with the rest as with that, you will be a grand success, you will, indeed."

"But I shall not be able. We may as well face that matter first as last. At the beginning I shall be very stupid. I shall spell every Latin name wrong, perhaps, and not know the difference."

"Ah, my dear! Do you think I have not prepared for that? Why, you must know that the change of a single letter in some names or descriptions would result in the utmost confusion; and in any scientific work perfect orthography is absolutely necessary. But I have picked up a few little primers on the subject of our task, and you are to consult them continually. You will soon see that there is a general principle in the construction of all terms, and that spelling Latin is, after all, easier than spelling English. It is to me. I frequently have to pause to think out an English word, oftentimes the simpler the more puzzling, but a Latin one never."

"Happy mortal — I mean, sir! I fear I shall be a terrible trial to you. And you must know that you can send me about my business at the first



blunder, if you feel so inclined. Dear me! That does n't sound right! What I want to say, only I am such an old stupid, is: Please do not let your friendship for us prevent your dismissing me if I don't suit you."

"Why! Why, my dear!" exclaimed Mr. Brook, very much surprised. "I thought you were a girl whose vocabulary did not contain the word 'fail.'"

"It used to be that way. But now — I guess I'm not as conceited as I was awhile ago. The older I get the less I feel that I know. And —"

"Tut, tut! Though that is an excellent state of things, too. There is hope of a person conscious of his own deficiencies. But all this in due time. By the way, have you yet discovered the secret of the linden-trees, the source of your wealth that is to be?"

Beatrice opened her eyes widely at this abrupt change of subject, but answered promptly: "Oh, no, indeed! I had almost forgotten that! But what lovely trees they are! They will soon be in bloom!"

"So I suppose, so I suppose. Therefore we will make our first lesson, or our first day's work, upon the *Apis mellifica*. You are upon my mind; after I get your affairs settled more satis-



factorily, I shall be better able to attend to my own. Yes, yes, that matter first; the other in due time."

Bonny could not conceal her astonishment. How Mr. Brook's talk did wander, from technical and scientific terms to a fable of hidden wealth in a row of old trees! She wondered if her mother had ever observed anything like this, and if that were what she meant when she so earnestly counselled patience. Was her beloved old friend in his second childhood?

He lifted his bright eyes from the page he had been reading and caught her own questioning gaze. "Out with it, my dear, out with it! How have I surprised you?"

The young secretary hesitated, then answered frankly, "I did not see the connection between my 'treasure' and your science."

"If you are not a deal more stupid than I have taken you to be, you will see it within the next few hours. And you need not fear, I am all right mentally, my dear; thank God, quite sound-minded, if I am an octogenarian." And the queer old gentleman crossed the room, laughing so mischievously that Bonny was forced to join him, though believing that she was making mirth at her own expense.



Mr. Brook came back to his own table beside that of his secretary, bearing an open case of what she considered very uninteresting "dried bugs," and placing the case before her pointed to one and another of the objects therein with kindling enthusiasm. "These are different specimens of the *Apis*, in perfect forms, in abnormal ones, in portions, and groups. Every organ is here represented; this minute affair, for instance. Ah! you cannot see it as it is, even with your young eyes. Take the magnifier. See? Isn't it wonderful?"

Beatrice took the magnifying-glass and examined the speck of insect anatomy which her employer had designated. "Why, it looks like a little saw!"

"Exactly, exactly. A saw so tiny, yet so thorough in its work that it can pierce a heavy buckskin glove if the mechanic who wields it so desires. Ah! I have been studying these little fellows for many years, yet I am freshly amazed each time I see them."

The enthusiasm was inspiring. Bonny took up the different cards from the case, and began to examine them through the microscope. She had always loved to watch living creatures, but dead ones had heretofore held little interest for



her. She found her ideas rapidly changing. "Has this queer little saw a name, a common name, that would mean something to me?"

"Certainly. It is a sting, a bee's sting. *Apis mellifica* is honey bee."

"And it is that mite of a thing which hurts?"

"Exactly. A point so small that the finest cambric needle is larger, yet look! Here are the two hollows between the saws which, lying face to face, form a pipe for the poison to flow through. This is the poison bag. These curious little affairs are the handles which pump the sting, the saws, down into the flesh. One side first, making a wedge-like opening, through which the other saw is promptly forced. Then by another motion down goes the fluid which poisons, or the sac itself is pushed into the wound. Talk about guns and cannons! Here you have something far more complete than either, and in proportion to its size far more dreadful in its effects. Why, one of these stings has sometimes killed a man, though I did not mean to refer to that! Such cases are rare, indeed. And usually a bee-sting amounts to very little."

"Well, but you need not reassure me, dear Mr. Brook! After this exhibition I shall not inter-



fere with any bees whose acquaintance I may chance to make."

"Don't be too positive, my dear, don't be too positive. You may have to change your mind."

"Why, I thought our work lay among dead things, all these of your collection. I did not know that we were to hunt among *new* fields."

"*We* are not; but *you* may, of your own accord, before I have done with you. I hope so. Yes, I foresee that you will often leave me in the midst of a very busy day just because of my friend *Apis*, alive and buzzing."

Again that gay laugh, and again Beatrice's utter mystification.

"Well, well, well. Suppose we read a bit of natural history this morning; or, rather, I will dictate to you and you take down what I have to say. I am writing a little treatise on the fellow *Apis*, — something quite apart from the collection, as a whole. I mean to publish it for the benefit of just such bright girls and boys as you and your brothers. Yes; I'll give you a chapter now."

There was more business in this arrangement, and it was business which Bonny had come for; so she rapidly made ready, and with fingers poised



above the keys of her machine waited for the opening sentence.

“‘Foods for the Honey-bee.’ That is the chapter title, and its number is seven. The other half-dozen are already prepared, though in my own handwriting. You will have to copy them sometime, before publication ; but — ready ?”

“Quite.”

The dictation began. Mr. Brook found it a little difficult to keep his current of thought as clear as usual, for the racket of the typewriter was so foreign to his accustomed quiet ; and besides this the frequent liftings of the typewritist’s head, the amused glances of her dark eyes, were so distracting to the lover of young folks that he felt more than half inclined to give up the task for a while and go out upon a search for the new “subjects” they two might find together. However, he did his best, and at the end of a few paragraphs Bonny sprang up from her chair in a state of great excitement.

“Oh ! I’ve guessed it, I have, I have ! I know what my ‘source of wealth’ will be !”

“Hoity, toity ! I thought you were writing from dictation !” returned her old patron, smiling quite as brightly as herself.

“Yes, sir. Oh, yes, in a minute. Just,



please, let me ask you one or two things. May I? Can I?"

"How am I to prevent a headstrong young woman like yourself?"

"Do you believe I could manage them all myself?"

"Manage what? Here, Joanna, please!" called the pleased old gentleman to his sister crossing the veranda.

Miss Brook came and leaned upon the window-ledge, and smiled in upon them. "Well, I must say I don't know which is the more enthusiastic! Brother, dear, how old are you? Do you contemplate going into the business for yourself?"

"Eighty, my dear, eighty, if a day! But look at the child! Hear her ask me, 'Can she? May she?' when already she is feeling herself a millionaire."

All this time not a word which an outsider could have understood had been spoken; and as this thought flashed over Bonny she laughed again. "Dear Mr. Brook, I thought at first that you were 'not quite yourself' this morning! Beg pardon, but I did. And now I am as bad. Maybe, after all, we are not talking about the same thing."

"Maybe not! Oh! I dare say not," replied





“LET ME ASK YOU ONE OR TWO THINGS. MAY I?”







the merry old gentleman, pacing rapidly back and forth.

“And quite difficult for me, I think!” added Miss Joanna, smiling too.

“Will you please tell me *your* thought, Mr. Brook?” asked Beatrice, eagerly.

“With pleasure. I would have done so long ago, only you did n’t ask it. I think the scheme I have formulated —”

“But I have not heard it in words, Brother!”

“The scheme I have formulated, Joanna, will keep this growing girl out of doors, as she should be, and make a wise recreation after her hours of labor here. It will teach her more of real natural history than I can preach to her, and will make her far more interested in my work. It will fill her small pocket with some needed extra cash. Last, but not least, it will give that unquiet small brother of hers a chance to get rid of his surplus energy in a legitimate way. He can do all the tree-climbing, for which I should, if I were a girl with such an irrepressible relative, give him a small share in the business. It — Go on, Miss. How can you wish to interrupt such a flow of argument?”

As if he had been the grandfather he had himself suggested, Bonny crossed swiftly to her em-



ployer's side and laid her hand upon his shoulder. "Because I thank you for showing me how to help myself. The one word which will tell *my* thought is — "

At that moment Mr. Dolloway's solemn face appeared above Miss Joanna's own with such suddenness that Bonny's "word" waited for his. He had evidently come freighted with ill news.

"Oh, sir, what is it? Is my mother — "

Mr. Dolloway shook his head dolefully, but a genuine distress was in the gesture. "'Tain't your mother, Miss Beatrice. It's that pesky, dear little brother of yours."

"What's happened him? Anything new? The hens?"

"Hens! If it was only hens! But hens it is n't this time. It's roofs an' cisterns an' bangs an' black-an'-blues. If he ain't dead — "

Poor Bonny did not pause to remember that she was a salaried employee, but, without leave or license, darted from the house and across the fields with an aching heart.



## CHAPTER XV.

### STREAKS OF HUMAN NATURE.

“**I**T must be something dreadful this time! Roland has left his ploughing, and the old horse is walking about as she pleases. The men are not working upon the cistern, and — Can it be he is drowned?”

These thoughts flashed through the sister's mind as she hurried homeward, past the field of sweet-smelling, freshly turned sods where her brother's plough stood idly in the furrow; and as she burst into the sitting-room her face was white and her breath well spent.

But nothing so very dreadful met her gaze. Robert was, indeed, lying upon the lounge well wrapped in blankets, but his dark eyes were the first to discover Bonny's entrance, and his voice the one to demand: “What you home for, Bon?”

“Why — why — you precious darling! Are n't you killed?”

“Wull — wull — I guess not! What's the matter with you, anyway? What's the matter



with everybody? Can't a feller slide offen a roof 'ithout stirrin' up the hull neighborhood, I'd like to know!"

Belle had been sitting, watching the patient, but at this outburst of remonstrance she laughed and left her post. "I'll find Mother now, and tell her you've come in. I think Bob is all right, anyway."

"Course I am. Who said I was n't?"

"Your 'chum,' Mr. Dolloway."

"H'm-m! What'd he say?"

"I don't remember exactly. Oh, yes, I do, too. He said 'roofs,' 'cisterns,' 'bangs,' 'blacks and blues,' etc. What did he mean?"

"Nothin'. Only I slid offen the roof into the cistern. Nen he an' my mother come an' made a dretful time. They said I was 'bout killed, but I was n't. An' my mother she sent Roland off fer a doctor-man, 'cause she's boun' I've broke some o' my insides. She says a feller could n't jest slide that little bit 'ithout hurtin' hisself somehow. It was n't no use I tellin' her. Roland went quick as lightnin'. Nen the carpenter an' mortar man they went away to get some more stuff to fix the thing up so's I can't slide in no more; an' that's all."

"All! Robert, you certainly will scare my



mother to death with your behavior, even if you don't get killed yourself. And if you're not hurt, why are you lying here wrapped up this fashion?"

"'Cause my mother made me. What's more, she took my clothes away, an' says they've got to be washed an' I'll have ter lie still till they dry. I think it's mean I can't wear my Sunday ones; don't you?"

"I think it is a wise precaution. But how in the world did you manage to slide off the roof? What were you doing up there? Tell me the whole story."

"I wanted ter make the rooster turn round faster. He's rusty on his hinges, Mr. Dolloway says, 'cause he, the rooster, is awful old, old as Mr. Brook maybe. An' I got my mother's oil-can, 'cause he said old things needs oilin', an' I clumb up. I was goin' to s'prise you all, an' — It's mean. I can climb like anything now, Bon."

"How did you fall? On your head?"

"Pooh! What fools girls is! If I'd 'a' fell on my head, I would 'a' been hurt, you bet. But I just slid inter that pile o' mortar the men had mixed ter fix the cistern with. My feet went in clear up to my waist! Nen, when my mother



caught hold o' me, she had a nawful job to pull me out. She got all over dirt herself, too; so she's got to have her clothes washed too!"

"But the bruises? Where are they?"

Robert struggled to unwind himself from the folds of blanket in which maternal anxiety had enswathed his plump little limbs and displayed those members with a look of triumph.

"Shades of Jacob's coat — Joseph's, I mean! There is not an inch of originally colored skin upon you! But see here, young man! Those are not all *new* bruises; though, if Mr. Dolloway saw them, I don't wonder he thought you were about killed. Those are the scars of many battles with misfortune, if I'm not much mistaken!"

"Wull, who said they wasn't? That yellor an' green patch, that come the time I fell out the cherry-tree, the first day I got here. That —"

"Never mind the enumeration. You are beautifully mottled, sort of like a tortoise-shell cat. And I've run away from my work, scared poor Miss Joanna into a fit, and behaved altogether badly, just because you slid off a roof! Now I must take my bit of lunch quickly and get back. And, by the way, Bob, if you'll promise not to do anything more to plague Motherkin all this



day till I get home again, I'll tell you a secret, a good one."

The child's face lighted eagerly, and a rash promise was on his tongue's end, but he be-thought himself of the chrysanthemum affair and paused in time. "Pooh! I s'pose it's som'-thin' to get me inter another scrape. Nen —"

"Don't be so wise, my dear. I am going to tell my mother the first. But I thought it would please you to know, too, and you could be making happy plans while you were obliged to lie here. Heigho! There comes Roland and somebody in a phaeton! The doctor, I suppose. Now, my sweet, you're in for it! I hope it will be a lesson to you!"

"Oh, Bon, don't go away! You would n't leave a feller in a trouble, would you? An' if he should, mebbe he will, find I was smashed up inside somewhere, how bad you'd feel about fersakin' your poor little brother, would n't you? I — I wish you 'd stay, Bon!"

"I must let the professional gentleman in first, then find my mother. But if you behave like a little soldier he won't hurt you very much, not so *very* much!"

Beatrice felt a little guilty in frightening the unlucky child as she was doing; still she



believed that it might result in future relief to the rest of the family, and persisted. Robert had never been placed under a physician's care before; for the innumerable bumps and bruises he had suffered at the mischance of fate or his own mischief had been cared for by maternal hands alone. Ditto all the childish diseases with which he, in common with the rest of the juvenile world, had been afflicted; and it was, perhaps, one of the reasons for the young Beckwiths' good health that their mother had been too poor to dose them with drugs, but had relied as far as might be on Doctor Nature instead.

"She must have been terribly frightened this time, to have sent for a physician!" thought Beatrice, as she admitted the gentleman; and it was not until she had questioned Isabelle that she learned how serious the boy's hurt had at first been supposed.

"He lay unconscious for more than an hour, Bonny; and I never saw Mother so distressed. She thought he had been injured internally, and could not rest until she had somebody examine him. Poor little chap! he'll be felt of from head to foot now; and I, too, hope it will be a lesson to him. I actually fear he will be killed some time in some of these 'accidents.'"



“Not a bit of it! At least I don’t think so now, though Mr. Dolloway did frighten me. But what a pretty little luncheon you have set out! Did you make that batch of biscuits, or Motherkin?”

“I — I myself. And, Bonny, I’m sorry I was so hateful about the housework. Mother has been talking with me and showing me how I can manage. She thinks after I have learned I may be almost as quick as you; and if I plan my work systematically from day to day, that I will be able to get some hours each day for painting or sketching. If I do not have to give up all I dreamed, I shall not mind it so much.”

Bonny threw her arms about her sister’s neck, and gave her a loving kiss. “I think that’s splendid of you, Belle! I have wished I could do both your share and that for which Mr. Brook has offered me payment. But I cannot; and something I read the other night may be a help to all of us. It was about ‘traditions,’ binding ourselves to do just as everybody has settled is the best way for the majority to do. I am not a lucid explainer, but it is like this: I’ve heard you quote dear Miss Joanna for authority in housekeeping matters, country housekeeping; and her servants say she is a ‘model.’ Certainly the



great mansion is always spick and span from top to bottom; but that is for *her*, not for *us*. There are so many things we can let go, or rather, never undertake, that are wholly unnecessary. The article said that, given a perfect cleanliness, many other ideas about 'dirt' were just 'fussiness.' In the first place, she who wishes to do something else with her time besides housekeeping should never burden her rooms with knick-knacks. 'Trash,' that writer called the lots of things one generally strews about on tables and shelves. Every extra article put into a room means so much extra dusting and cleaning, and so much time to do that in. And a lot more talk like that. It seemed to me, when I had finished reading, that housework might be made ever so much simpler and shorter if one studied how in the same way one studies to learn anything else. For instance, when I began my typewriting it seemed to me that I should never be able to write fast enough to earn my salt; but after a while it came easier, till, for a girl of my age, I really think I do quite well both at that and lecturing! Don't you?"

"I think you have certainly talked faster than you have eaten; but the notion is a good one. It is ever so much like what Mother told me this



morning. Must you go? Won't you wait to see her first?"

"I ought not. She is closeted with the doctor, and bent upon finding broken bones somewhere about Bob's anatomy. With that end in view she will be unseeable for some time to come. And look! Roland is chasing that nag, the first time I ever saw her gallop in her life! Poor boy! Give him my kindest regards, accept the same for yourself, and believe me, yours truly, Bon! Really, Belle, I think you're splendid, and your lunch was fine; and Roland is a pattern, — my mother says so, — and Robert is the dearest, roughest, most exciting little chap in the world. We are a brilliant family! And I have another fine scheme which I will divulge to the assembled multitude this evening. No; it's not my scheme, either, it's Mr. Brook's; so, sure to be right. Good-bye."

"Farewell! But, say, Bonny!"

"Well?" turning upon the doorstep, with a bit of impatience showing on her merry face.

"Do you talk all the time when you are at Mr. Brook's, or —"

"Isabelle!" called Mrs. Beckwith's voice from the sitting-room.

"Yes, Mother."



“Please make a cup of tea and bring it to the doctor, with a plate of biscuit. He has a long drive before him, and must not be let to go without something.”

“Dear, dear me! My mother’s hospitality is something formidable! The very first biscuits I ever made! And this tea does n’t taste like that we used to get in town! But if she had only a glass of cold water and a bit of hard-tack, she’d offer it to the Queen of England, with just that same easy grace. Well, one thing I foresee in the country is the frequency of ‘droppers in,’ as Mr. Dolloway calls them. But the next caller who comes shall have better biscuits than these, even if Bonny did praise them. And after all, it’s rather pleasant to think people are willing to be social with you, as country folks seem inclined, without knowing all about your past life. That’s one thing I like! And there’s something very pleasant in the word ‘neighbor.’ I love to hear Miss Joanna say it, in her low voice; and if I am to be a house-mistress I’m going to be a good ‘neighbor,’ too, with her for a pattern as well as my little Motherkin.”

Whether the reflections with which Isabelle prepared her tray of simple refreshments had anything to do with the grace of the serving may



be guessed ; certainly, instead of the half-frown which Mrs. Beckwith feared to see, the girl's manner was so genial and withal so modest that the plain fare acquired a keen relish for the hungry physician, who had still many miles to drive before he could find leisure for his own table ; and he went away with the thought in mind : " That family is an addition to the town. I like them. I like them all, from the fragile-looking mother down to the rough little boy. But he's a shaver ! I took good care to punch hardest on the sorest places, for he needs a lesson ! Well, that may be my first visit, but I think it will not be my last to The Lindens, under the new régime ! "

" Dear, I am pleased with you ! " said Mrs. Beckwith, warmly, giving her daughter a motherly caress. " I was afraid you would find it a trial to be hospitable. "

" It was, Motherkin ! But I — conquered. "

A second kiss followed the first, and Isabelle resolved that the next tax put upon her " neighborliness " should not be matter of so much surprise to her little mother.

" Is Bob all right ? "

" Yes, fortunately, though he is badly scared. And he is the strangest child. He will never



climb upon that slippery roof again, but he is as certain to do something quite as bad and not to be anticipated, the moment he has his liberty. I wish there was a good school near; but that is the drawback to this place."

"Bonny used to be almost as ingenious for mischief, did n't she? I remember when some 'flats' were building on the block next our home you forbade her 'ever playing on that pile of lumber again.' She never did, but she played on another pile which you had n't mentioned and broke her arm. Still, she is a pretty good sort of a girl now, and very clever, everybody says. She was the youngest, you know, in our typewriting class, and I should n't wonder if she were the very first to get a situation."

"Oh, yes, I have faith, perfect faith, in all my dear ones, Isabelle. But now, if there are any more of those biscuits left, please call Roland in and we will have our lunch. This has been one of the days when housekeeping could not go by rule and measure."

"I hope there won't be many such!" exclaimed the daughter, earnestly, and went to summon her elder brother. But she presently returned with a disappointed face. "He says he cannot come, that he does not care for anything to eat. He



has lost so much time already, and he had set out to accomplish just so much of that ploughing this morning."

There was a moment's hesitation; then Mrs. Beckwith herself went to the door and called pleasantly: "Roland! lunch is ready."

"I'm not coming, Mother; I can't."

"You must. I cannot allow you to go without eating regularly, now that you are doing hard labor for the first time in your life. Please come at once, and do not hinder Isabelle any longer. She, too, has had a disappointing morning in some ways."

Now Roland was but seventeen. If he had been ten years older, he would not have answered as he did. "Oh, Mother, I wish you'd let me alone! I'm not a baby to be ordered like Robert! And I am not — going — to eat — one mouthful till I — am ready."

Isabelle could scarce believe that she heard the words, which were only too distinct through the open doorway. "Humph! That's what comes of making a stripling the 'head of the family.' That sounds like one of those young roosters of Miss Joanna's trying to crow. That's what comes of sacrificing 'womenkind to our young man.' The horrid thing!"



“ Isabelle ! ”

Startled by the sharpness of pain which the tone evinced, Belle looked swiftly into her mother's eyes, and read there that the matter was not a theme for jest.

“ Poor little woman ! ” thought the girl, as she cleared away the lunch things ; “ how it does hurt her when she discovers that we *are* coarse barn-yard fowls, after all ! Poor little woman ! She'd die for any of us, if it were necessary, but we just make her heart ache with ‘ cussedness ’ ! H'm-m ! I begin to think the Beckwiths are not that brilliant collection of perfections Bonny claimed ! Bob spoiled the morning, and now Roland has finished the afternoon ! Though I must admit *I* began the list of sorrows by behaving like a selfish, silly thing, crying over the dishes ! ”

For somehow upon the bright spring landscape a shadow seemed to have fallen ; and though Roland carried his point and finished the number of furrows he desired, the sods he turned no longer greeted his nostrils with that sweet odor which had given him such pleasure heretofore, and between himself and the ground appeared all through that afternoon the gentle reproachful face of a mother aggrieved.



## CHAPTER XVI.

### A MODERN KING ARTHUR.

“The ploughman he’s a bonny lad,  
His mind is ever true, jo;  
His garters knit below his knee,  
His bonnet it is blue, jo.  
Then up wi’ my ploughman lad,  
And hey my merry ploughman!  
Of all the trades that I do ken,  
Commend me to the ploughman.”

BONNY brought her song to an end beside her brother at the door of the little stable, whither, at the close of the afternoon, he had guided his horse; and though her rich young voice was music in his ears, Roland turned toward his sister a face which did not respond to the mirth of hers.

“Hello, Bon! Back? Well, how does it seem to be a day-laborer?”

“Ah! my laddie, how does it seem to be a ploughman? Prettier in song than reality, eh? Why, Roland!”



“Well, what?”

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing.”

“Stuff!”

“I tell you there isn’t anything the matter with — me. I’m not accountable for other people’s whims.”

The lad dropped the head-stall, and Nan, set free of her harness, walked quietly into her own place; while Beatrice, perching herself upon the manger’s front, threw her arms about her brother’s neck and gave him a resounding smack.

“There! That’s for ‘my ploughman, my jo’! Say, my dear, you have the heart-ache!”

“Don’t bother, Bon!”

“I’d rather bother Roland! What is it, Laureate? You will have to tell me sometime, you know; you might as well now. Besides, I’m dying to tell you something in return.”

“Well, tell. Then, maybe —”

“‘A swarm of bees in May is worth a load of hay!’ How did you guess?”

“Guess what? I wish you wouldn’t be silly, Bon. My head aches, I’m awfully tired, and I’m crosser than cross.”

“That last is an axiom, — a self-evident fact, you know; and I’m sorry for the head, but sor-



rier for the heart. Something has gone wrong, ever so far wrong. What is it, Bubsey?"

"Beatrice, if you don't stop using that ridiculous name for me, I'll —"

"Kiss me, Roland, and make up. I declare it makes me feel as down-spirited as Mr. Dollo-way in a rheumatic attack to come home all full of my scheme and have you throw cold water on me this way. Really, dear, you must tell me. You know I always tease till I find out."

Roland looked at her angrily; but there was something so genuinely loving and sympathetic in the piquant face before him that he felt moved to unburden his mind of the load it had carried. Not a very big load, some lads might think, but, to a nature as earnest and chivalrous as Roland Beckwith's, quite bitter enough. "Well, then, I have behaved outrageously to my mother."

"Roland — Beckwith! You!"

In two minutes the little story had been told.

"What did Motherkin say?"

"Not one word. If she'd only scold!"

"No; that's one disobliging thing about our mother. I 'sym,' dear; I've been there myself. I've often felt as if a good, downright nagging would n't hurt one-thousandth part as much as one of those astonished glances of hers. They



cut like a knife just home from the sharpener's. Well, so you did n't have any luncheon?"

"I did n't want any; I could n't have eaten it, after that."

"That accounts for the headache; so both head and heart pains are settled for. Now, the cure. Come along with me."

"No, I'd rather not. If Mother happened out here, I'd talk it over with her. I'm a confounded idiot, Bon. I felt so big and manly, somehow, thinking I had the whole 'farm' under my own control; and then I was mad at that young one everlastingly getting into trouble for somebody else to be plagued with; and I'd made up my mind to accomplish just so much of the ploughing, no matter what happened. And it *is* awful hard work. I would n't acknowledge it before; but it seems sometimes as if I could n't drag one foot after the other. And look at my hands!"

The flood-gates of his pride and reserve opened at last, all the trials and actual sufferings the untaught lad had experienced during his brief experiment of farming tumbled over Roland's lips in a torrent of words. He felt perfectly secure in making these confidences, for whatever her faults might be, Beatrice "never blabbed,"



and she loved him so dearly that all he felt was shared by her in almost a stronger degree. When he had finished there were tears in her bright eyes; and she forced Roland to take a portion of the sharp-edged seat she occupied, so that she might "cuddle to him" with her warm sympathy.

"I'll tell you what it is, Laureate! Brother Dolloway is right! 'Life is n't all catnip! They's consid'able burdock an' puss'ley mixed through it.' But we've got to get along with it the best we can; and all the matter with us is we're too 'all-fired' smart!"

"Bon! don't laugh!"

"If I don't I shall cry; and I'm only copying my respected mother when I say I'd 'rather laugh.' But I mean it. We're smart. We're dangerously clever, and we know it; that's all the trouble. You are a seventeen-year-old and you've been attempting to do and to be a grown-up man, — I mean, to do what a man long trained to hard work would do; and that has made you feel as if you were a man in every respect. If you can just get back to be Roland the lad, you'll be all right. And I'm not a-preachin' no sermons what I is n't willin' ter take home to myself. No, sir. I've been that conceited an' 'sot up' that I actually felt as if there could



nobody take my place at home ; yet at the same time there was nobody could take my place abroad, so to speak, and abroad being Mr. Brook's study. But I've been a dunce. All I have to do for Mr. Brook anybody with a reasonable amount of intelligence — not so much as mine, of course ! but an ordinary capacity, like anybody's not a Beckwith — could do. I made heaps of blunders when we really set to work this afternoon, and my blessed old gentleman came mighty near losing his temper. He didn't quite lose it, however, though he danced around on the edge of the precipice for a few minutes, and it would have gone over, I think, if Miss Joanna hadn't appeared. It all came from my self-conceit, every bit of it. I read a few rules for the orthography and then I thought I knew it all ; and off I dashed, hot foot, and had three whole pages to rewrite, besides the annoyance to my employer of the wasted time. But *that* won't happen again. I've put on the brakes and I mean to go slow next time, probably too slow ; but — ”

Roland knew that the only way to stem the current of Beatrice's talk was to interrupt, which he did without ceremony. “Do you suppose my mother would come out here to me ?”

“I suppose she would walk on her head if we



asked her; but I shouldn't think it a manly thing to do."

"Why not? I hate to make a talk before Belle and — everybody."

"Roland, don't think I'm hateful, but you did n't hesitate to speak horridly to Mother before 'everybody,' did you?"

"I was mad then."

"And you're sad now. No, a King Arthur kind of a fellow would go just as manfully to make his apologies as he did to commit his error. It will make Mother happy to hear your regret, no matter how you express it; but it will make her proud as well if you do so openly. Besides, what a shining example you will be to Bob-o'-Lincoln!"

"Dear little chap! I thought he was a goner, this morning. I tell you he looked awful when we got him out of that mortar heap!"

"I should think he must! But if Nan has enough to eat, let's go into the peace-room and have a happy time. I do wonder, every time I'm bad, why I can't remember then how horrid it feels to be unhappy. I never do, and good resolutions are n't worth very much above par in my case."

For a moment Roland did not answer, but went



about putting his little stable into order for the night, and finding in the sense of proprietorship this gave him a slight solace for his wounded pride. For it was that, rather than actual repentance, which had tortured him all that afternoon. His nature, prone to idealize everything, had set up a standard of perfect gentlemanliness to be achieved, and the thought that he had been so petty as to lose temper with a woman, and that woman his mother, whom he was most bound to protect, had mortified him intolerably. It may not have been the highest sort of standard, but it was ennobling as far as it went.

When he could find no further excuse for loitering, he went to the pump and begged his sister to dash a stream of cold water over his aching temples ; then rising, shook himself like a young water dog, and strode valiantly out of the building.

Bonny did not glance at him again, but taking up her Scottish melody went carolling into the house as if to herald a coming joy.

“Well, darling! Home again! After a long day of work. It is sweet of you to come so gayly, for you must be very tired.”

“And it is perfectly lovely of you, Motherkin, to take each little bit of decency in your offspring



and magnify it into a virtue. But you'll have your reward, my Madonna! You're going to have part of it — instantly!" cried the girl, nodding her head sagely, and crossing immediately to Robert's lounge, where she dropped down and fell to caressing that imprisoned piece of activity.

Roland did nothing by halves. He walked directly toward his mother, and said in a clear voice, so that the dreaded "everybody" might hear: "Mother, I beg your pardon. I behaved like a ruffian."

The ready tears sprung to the mother's eyes as her tall son bent to kiss her, but she answered as she would have answered any other who had trespassed upon good manners: "Don't mention it, dear. And I'm glad you are both in together, for Isabelle and I have been experimenting in the kitchen, and by the odor from thence I think our chicken-patties are done and ripe for eating!" Then she rose, took the arm of her "knight," and led the way to the table.

"Wull, wull, ain't I a-goin' ter have nothin'?" demanded the "invalid," indignantly, as Bonny rose also, and he was threatened with apparent neglect.

"Mother, don't you think it's about time for Sunday clothes?" asked that young person, coaxingly.



“Ye-s ; if Robert will be — ”

“I’ll be as good as a gold boy, Motherkin !  
I’ll be as good as Roland, if I can !”

A general laugh greeted this promise, and under cover of it, Bonny lifted her little brother from his couch of punishment and bore him aloft, to return in about five minutes looking perfectly cherubic in a clean face and the aforementioned holiday attire.

“Now,” said Bonny, after the supper things had been cleared away and the little household had gathered before the blaze upon the hearth, which partly Mrs. Beckwith’s fondness for it and partly the still chilly evenings rendered a nightly affair, — “now have I at last the permission of the household to relieve my mind of its terrible tension ? I have been keeping a secret for — six — mortal — hours, and if I can’t tell it soon I shall be ill, maybe.”

“The Secretary has the floor !” responded the now joyful mother.

“Then, it has been proposed to me — No, that is n’t the best, the most mysterious way of beginning. Ahem ! Has anybody found out the hidden source of my promised wealth ? Has anybody learned the secret of The Lindens ?”

“Yep,” answered Robert, promptly, “skunks.”



"Oh, you horrid youngster! Say 'Mephitis' whenever you have occasion to mention so inodorous a subject. No, you are not right. Next?"

"Knowledge under difficulties," volunteered Belle.

"You're away off — a thousand miles, though it *will* be knowledge under difficulties — exceedingly painful ones, too, probably. I'll explain that ambiguity later. Now, next?"

"Contentment, which is better than any riches," suggested Mrs. Beckwith, quietly.

"No, Motherkin. Sorry to send you 'down foot,' but obliged to do it, you know. Roland? Have you no ideas to be ventilated?"

"They are quite like Mother's. Health, independence, and happiness will come to us here under a lot of hard toil. And, yes, my 'express wagon.'"

"What? What is that? Have you a secret too?"

"Of course I have."

"Tell it."

"Ladies first."

"You're too gallant!"

"You were 'dying to explain' a moment since!"

"All right. My secret is — a bee, *Apis mel-*



*lifica*, — a most lively little fellow with a saw in his latter end.”

“Beatrice!”

“Beg pardon. But I’m so excited! Mr. ‘Humpty-Dumpty’ and I are almost immediately to become apiarists!”

“Child, what has put such a notion as that into your head?”

“Our beloved Mr. Brook, and Miss Joanna also. They saw a chance for us to make some money, which we all agree we need, and suggested that method. They have explained the whole transaction to me, as well as anybody can explain by just talking, and to-morrow, if you approve, we are to drive a few miles into the country and visit a famous apiary of which Mr. Brook knows. There I can see the practical working of the thing, and I am assured that we can find a market for our honey — when we get it! What do you say, Motherkin?”

“What can I say, dearie, with so little knowledge of the subject as I possess?”

“But if Miss Brook and Mr. Brook and even Mr. Dolloway approve, you’ll say yes, won’t you?”

“I will always say yes to reasonable things. I foresee that I shall yet do so to this new scheme.



But what is the connection between bees and lindens?"

"The same that there was between your hungry girl and Isabelle's chicken patties. The trees furnish the bees a favorite food in great abundance. Then, to supplement them, Roland will plant some crops which will be useful to Mr. Apis or Mrs. Apis, and that will also be good for us. The honey they take away will not hurt any crop he can raise. Robert is to be the one to help swarm the bees and to look after them while I am away. He is to share in the business."

"If he makes it such a success as the hen affair, I am sure we shall be millionaires eventually!" laughed the elder sister, teasingly.

"Give the youngster time, Madam Housekeeper! His hens are going to come out all right; are n't they, 'Humpty-Dump'?"

"Course. Belle does n't know, does she?"

"Belle never kept any hens, did she? and Robert did!" returned Bonny, gayly. Whatever the others might think, she never lost faith in either brother.

"But will it not cost a great deal to begin the business, much more than we ought to spare at present?" asked Mrs. Beckwith.

"No, I think not. Mr. Brook suggests that I



use my own earnings for the purpose, if you will allow me. He is confident I shall get back more than a fair interest upon the investment. You see, he is n't telling anything he has not already verified. He's a wonderful man, is Mr Brook!" responded Beatrice, falling into a reverie, which lasted so long that Roland interrupted.

"We've all acknowledged that long since. What now has roused your admiration?"

"Why, everything he thinks will be a help to somebody he experiments with himself first. It was so with bee-keeping. There was a crippled man with a delicate wife and lots of children, in whom our patron was interested. The man was hurt in a railway accident, or something like that, and could never afterward do any hard work. Mr. Brook's study of bees and their habits made him think that an apiary would be just the thing for this family, who had a bit of a place a few miles from here, the same place he wishes me to visit to-morrow. So he tried the thing himself, and demonstrated that it was a paying thing; then he handed his bee outfit over to those people, and they are now living very comfortably, besides being able to educate their children."

"Just from bees?"

"Just from bees. And it is not a business so



overstocked that others need fear to enter it. If Mother is willing, I shall be so glad to try it."

"It will need a great deal of patience, and you will get terribly stung."

"Everything needs patience, seems to me! The very quality of which I have the smallest stock is continually in demand. And as for the stinging, some people scarcely feel the stings, others have been killed by them."

"Beatrice! you are not using a good argument in favor of your scheme," remonstrated the careful mother.

"Wull, wull, if I'm goin' ter be stung ter death, I'd ruther stick to hens," remarked Robert, sagely.

"That was only to put the very worst foot forward, my dearie. The persons stung to death may have been one out of a million. Besides, you have already been stung a dozen times since we came here, by one bug or other, and you are still very much alive, as witness your escapade of this morning."

"Mother, can I have a drink of milk?" asked "Humpty-Dumpty," desiring to change the subject.

"If Beatrice will get it for you."

"Of course I'll do anything for my partner!"



replied the girl, gayly. "But, just by way of getting down to facts, how many drinks of milk have you already had since you left your bed this day — this morning, I mean?"

"It's good for him, dear," commented Mrs. Beckwith, pleasantly; "and such a luxury that we have a cow, and milk of our own to drink."

Bonny danced out of the room, and down the stairs cellarward, either not hearing or not obeying her mother's suggestion that she would better take a candle with her. The others, left before the cheerful firelight, sat idly musing over the bee project or some other hopeful plan, even the milk-hungry boy was silent, when there came the sound of a heavy fall, the crashing of china, and the shrill shriek of Beatrice, in a mingled confusion that sent every person to a standing posture and chilled every heart with fear.

"She's fallen downstairs! She must have broken her bones!"

"My custard! my custard!" cried Belle.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### ROLAND'S PROJECT.

“ **B**ONNY, are you hurt ? ”

“ Bonny, have you spilled my custards ? ”

“ Bonny, have you broken down the stairs ? ”

For answer to all these anxious inquiries, which indicated the particular dread of each inquirer, there presently came up from the region of darkness below a ripple of hysterical laughter, which rapidly increased in volume till the hearers were forced to join in it.

This was more than Robert could patiently endure, and, regardless of Sunday clothes, he bounded down the stairs, and so noisily that he did not hear Beatrice's swift remonstrance: “ Don't, Bob ! For mercy's sake, don't come down here ! There, you 've finished it ! ”

Mrs. Beckwith quietly and cautiously followed the headlong flight of her youngest child, and half-way to the lower floor stopped in utter dismay. There, at the bottom of the flight, sat Bonny, with Robert in her lap, whither he had



fallen promptly, amidst a pile of broken cups, and with each of the unfortunates plentifully splashed with some sort of sticky, yellowish liquid.

“ Well, what have you done ? ”

“ Why, spilled the custards ! ”

“ What were you doing with them ? ” demanded Isabelle, sharply, from the head of the stairs.

“ Nothing — that is, ‘ I did n’t go for to do nothing ’ with them ! When I went away to work yesterday morning, there were two pans of milk on that swing-shelf. I could have gone in the dark and found them easily ; so I did ! ” And away went Beatrice into another peal of laughter as infectious as it was ridiculous.

“ Mother told you to take a light ! ”

“ I did n’t hear her. Besides, it did n’t seem worth while to go to that trouble. Why did you put custards in the milk’s place ? And also, if you have custards, why don’t you feed them to your family instead of laying pitfalls with them to catch unwary maidens ? When I was housekeeper I — ”

“ When you were housekeeper you did exactly as you pleased, and nobody durst interfere ! ” said Belle, quickly. “ You see, Mother ! It’s of no use trying. There I worked extra hard to-night, so that I would not have to take my precious



morning light to-morrow to prepare dessert. I knew that our dinner was to be a very plain one, and so I thought I would piece it out with a little second course. All for nothing!"

Mrs. Beckwith made no comment upon this exclamation. The damage which Bonny's thoughtlessness had done was, she feared, far greater than the loss of a little daylight or one day's dessert. "Gather up your frock as carefully as you can, so that the stuff will not drip upon these clean stairs, then go directly out of doors; that is, if you are not hurt. I will come out on the grass and help you there. Here, Robert! Put this apron about you and follow Bonny. Your unfortunate Sunday clothes! They are ruined, I am afraid."

Isabelle retreated in a flood of tears, and Roland ran away to compose a sonnet to a "Maiden in Distress;" that being a safety-valve to let off his mirthfulness over the absurd affair. But Beatrice picked herself up stiffly and obeyed her mother without a word. Her fun had quite evaporated, and she felt heartily ashamed of herself.

"It's that eternal, undying conceit of mine, Motherkin! If I'd had any sense I'd have taken a lamp, even though I did not hear you.



But no! I — Bonny Beckwith — could go down cellar in the darkest night and do anything I wished! I was n't afraid, — I! But I'm so sorry, so awfully sorry about your pretty cups, Mother. You have had them so long and kept them so carefully. I don't understand yet how it happened."

"The explanation is simple enough. After Isabelle had made her custard, she poured it into the cups, and, it being hot, set them in an empty pan to carry the better downstairs. She had used the milk from the pan on the swing shelf, and it was a convenient place to keep her dessert until to-morrow, safe and high above the reach of the cat or any stray mice."

"It was high enough, in all conscience! I had to reach above my head to take the pan down, and I thought it felt amazing heavy then; but not until I reached the foot of the stairs and stumbled did I hear the cups rattle and realize that it was n't just milk I carried."

"There, turn around. The other side is all messed with it, too."

"Is it spoiled, Mother? Is my new clothes no more good?" wailed Robert, ruefully regarding the liberal dash of water which his mother gave those cherished articles.



“They will never look well again, but they will be wearable, I hope. Bonny’s fresh frock is unfit for further use, however, until after it is laundered again. What will you wear to-morrow, child?”

“The old winter one, I suppose.”

“But if you are going away with your employer, will it answer?”

“The best one, then. When a body has just one good gown and two week-day ones, she has n’t much trouble in making her decisions. I care only about the cups.”

“Don’t think of them again. I am thankful you were not hurt. But, my darling, is there nothing else you are sorry for?”

“Oh! I — suppose — so! The quarrel with Belle. But she was as much to blame as I. She should n’t have put the pan there if she did n’t want it tipped over.”

“Broken cups may be replaced, and soiled frocks made clean. These are trivialities; but a wounded spirit — I believe I can trust my Beatrice, can I not? Now come indoors. Roland has, also, a ‘secret’ to tell, or a statement to explain. He is probably impatient to do so. About the express wagon. Come, Robert. It is almost your bedtime, anyway.”



“Mother, if anybody is n’t good who lives with you, she ought to be ‘kicked by cripples’! You —”

“Beatrice, where do you learn such expressions?”

“That came from Brother — I mean Mr. — Dolloway’s vocabulary. He has a choice lot of ‘Sayings’ which he repeats on each and every occasion. This morning he said something about somebody being as ‘queer as Dick’s hat-band;’ and when I asked him how queer that was he answered, as quick as a flash, ‘Went half-way round and tucked under.’ He’s very original, and ever so funny.”

“He may be; but his expressions on your tongue are not funny, but silly. Why cannot you pattern after Miss Joanna? You hear only good English from her careful lips.”

“Natural depravity, Motherkin. But I’ll try. I think myself that Dollowayisms do not sound as well on ‘Humpty-Dump’s’ lips as they do on the ‘original Jacob’s.’ There it goes again! Mother, what does make me so thoughtless?”

“Dearie, I wish I knew!”

“I’ll find out! And I’ll conquer myself if — I can! I will, dear Mother, if you will keep faith in me.”

“My faith in you will only fail with my life,



darling. You must have faith in yourself, and not settle down to the belief that you cannot make yourself all that you would be. But — a truce to lectures for to-night! I want to hear what Roland has to say.”

They went into the “peace-room” again, and Beatrice placed her little brother beside herself on the rug before the fire “to dry off,” while Mrs. Beckwith roused Roland from his writing to tell them all about his new venture.

“Well, you see, Mr. Brook told me that there was no stage running from this place to Newburgh. There are two, or more, which do go from the town below us to the city above, but just here there is nothing of the kind. He proposed that I start a little ‘express route,’ fetching and delivering parcels for the New Windsorites, — those who either have no horses of their own, or do not care to trouble to drive regularly into the city. He will speak to several persons for me, and even a few families would be a good beginning. He says I can probably buy a small covered cart at the salesroom in Newburgh, second-hand, but adapted to my purpose; and that it will not hurt Nan to do the work. He proposes my making the trips three times a week at first, while I am busy getting in my crops — ”



“Hear! hear!” interrupted Bonny.

“Then later on I can go every day if it seems to be profitable. He also suggests that I begin right away, and offers to go into town with me and help me select my vehicle, if you approve. Mr. Dolloway says it will ruin me; that I’ve ‘undertook more’n a common man’d lay out ter do, anyhow;’ but I assured the old gentleman that I did not consider myself a ‘common man’ by any means, but that I was my mother’s son and meant to be worthy of my parentage.”

“Motherkin, that flattery is intended to wheedle the price of the ‘express wagon’ out of your pocket!” cried Beatrice, again, divining at once the thought of her mother’s mind.

Not that “wheedling” had any connection with the anxiety of the widow, but that she reflected, with grave doubts of its wisdom, how deeply she was dipping into their small sinking fund. She looked up smilingly, but asked seriously enough, “How much will that cost?”

“From thirty to forty dollars.”

“It will take you many days to get back that much money, even if the experiment proves a success. The houses are very scattered, and most of the people about us either very wealthy or very poor,—mill-workers and farm-employees, Miss



Brook told me. How can either class need such service?"

Roland's countenance fell. He felt the wide difference between the caution of maturity and the impulse of youth, and already foresaw that he would be obliged to relinquish his plan, for the want of that "paltry sum." But he hated to give up, and offered a suggestion: "I'm sure, since he proposed it, that Mr. Brook will lend me the money."

Mrs. Beckwith's answer was swift and decided: "Dismiss that notion at once. With my consent my children shall never run into debt. What we have of our own, what we can earn, that we may use; but the moment we begin to use other people's funds, that moment we not only sacrifice our own dignity but our freedom. Mr. Brook is a rich man. I do not doubt that he would give you outright the cart you wish; but you must be as honorable as he. Poverty need make no difference that way, thank God. We have sometimes gone pretty hungry, but we have never owed anybody yet. If you think I seem niggardly about the little left of our 'insurance money,' it is because I dare not reduce our rainy-day stock by any further great amount. However, I will myself see Mr. Brook in the morning and talk the matter



over with him. I have no desire to be over-prudent, but there are some questions I should like to ask. Now, Beatrice, if you are 'dried,' please open the piano. It is high time a band of toilers went to rest."

The devotions of the little family were very simple, and the mother always led them. It was mostly a service of song, and sent each heart away into the silence of the night the better and happier for its sweetness. This time, despite the resolution that it should not last long, it was prolonged, indeed, until brought to a sudden terminus by Robert going to sleep in an upright position at his mother's elbow, and losing his balance, falling headlong against the piano keys with a discordant crash!

"Finale! Positively the last appearance, and therefore the last accident, for the day of 'Mr. Humpty-Dump'!" cried Roland, and unceremoniously picked up his small brother and started stairwards with him.

"Ain't asleep! Sleep 'self! Lemme 'lone! I want — I want a bee — a chick — a — a — h-e-n —"

In five minutes the little fellow was in his own cosey "nest," unconscious how he arrived there, and dreaming of a poultry-house full of downy



chickens helping him to eat honey from a broken custard-cup.

The last to fall asleep that night under the old-time roof was Isabelle. Long after the others were at rest she sat by the uncurtained window of her "studio," watching the clouds in the sky, and feeling anything but happy.

"All the others are so busy, and all are earning their own money except me! Oh! nobody knows how hard it is! To give up everything I liked and bury myself alive in a horrid country town, which isn't even a village, but a collection of scattered tenements, with people living in them who never call upon their neighbors, except, of course, the Brooks. But they ought to be kind; they enticed us here! Though I did think this morning it all was going to be better and easier; to-night I'm utterly discouraged. If it were n't for breaking my mother's heart, I'd run away!"

Poor Isabelle! She had been the "show pupil" of her class, and the real talent she did possess had been magnified by injudicious praise into what was "genius" in her own estimation. She had been the only one who had disliked the country project, and she found her trials even greater than she had anticipated.



Presently, by dwelling upon the dark side of her lot, she had worked herself up into a most unenviable state of mind, and had thrown herself dramatically upon the floor to sob her grief away. But after a while she became conscious of some noise outside the building, and timidity very promptly banished melodrama.

She sat up and strained her ears to hear.

Crunch! crunch! crunch!

“Why — it — sounds — like — like — wheels!” she murmured with chattering teeth.

“Whack! bang!”

Surely that was a muttered imprecation which she caught!

Thieves? Housebreakers?

She neither dared to move nor cry out; but the five minutes she remained where she was seemed to her a lifetime. At the end of that space the echo of retreating footsteps was so plain that she rallied her courage and ran into Bonny's room, crying: “Wake up! wake up! We've been robbed! Burglars — Oh!”

“Yes, dear, I'm sorry. I won't do it again!” responded Beatrice, sleepily.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

### ROBERT'S OCCUPATION GONE.

IT was such an absurd answer that Isabelle laughed. In the laughter much of her fear, and all of her anger against her sister, vanished. With the quick rebound of her loving nature she clasped her arms about the neck of the sleepy Beatrice and kissed her heartily.

The disturbed secretary sat up and demanded: "What is the matter, eh? Oh, I remember. Well, I'm sorry, Belle. It was horrid of me, though I didn't intend to do it. I'd make you some more custards if Mother would let me; but I suppose she would say we could not afford so much luxury twice in the same week."

It does not matter what the elder girl replied. The reconciliation was complete, and once more two young hearts were beating high with aspirations after better things, although, it must be confessed, Bonny's ideas were rather vaguely exalted, owing to her drowsiness; but Belle was



keenly self-reproachful, and exclaimed earnestly :  
“I wonder why we never learn to be what we mean to be. It seems as if life were one long season of acting hatefully and trying to make amends. Why can't we be good?”

“Give it up.” Yawn. “And, dearie, I'm so sleepy I don't know what to do with myself. Are n't you?”

“I dare not go to sleep, I expect we have been robbed of everything we possess!” As the recollection returned to her of the real cause for her present visit, Isabelle felt her timidity also return, and, shaking her sister to keep that drowsy one's eyes open till she could tell the whole story, repeated what she had already tried twice to make the somnolent secretary comprehend.

“Ye-es. H'm-m!” Yawn. “Well, we're — all — right, are n't — we?”

“Don't you understand? Won't you understand? We have been robbed! B-u-r-g-l-a-r-s!” cried the other, spelling the terrible word letter by letter.

“Yes, that's right. I used to — spell it — l-e-r-s. I spelled — ‘Coleoptera’ — with a K; and Mr. Brook nearly had a spasm. I—I — won't do it again, I promise you.” Yawn.

“Goodness! She's asleep already! I don't



believe she will remember one single thing of this in the morning. I wonder if I ought to tell Mother! But Roland is the one, I suppose; only — ”

The thought entered the girl's mind, what if she told nobody, but kept her knowledge to herself and watched for more evidence before she aroused the weary sleepers? Would n't that be the more unselfish way? And if she were really in earnest about trying to be as noble as her mother desired, was not unselfishness a bottom principle, and might she not begin then as well as later?

She answered her own questioning by casting one more smiling glance upon the sleeper before her, and, by the light of the shaded lamp, which was always kept burning in the central hall from which all their bedrooms opened, making her way noiselessly back to her own apartment.

There she listened critically; but all was silent without, save for the peaceful sounds of insects in the trees and the plashing of the river at the foot of the bluff. Then she carefully dressed herself and sat down to await developments.

“Dear me! Nothing does happen, after all! And how cold it seems sitting about alone in the night-time! I — I believe I'll just creep inside the



bed covers and watch there! It would be safer as regards taking cold, and far more comfortable!"

Deluded girl! As she crept into bed in her full, every-day attire, and the strength of her brave resolution, she put herself deliberately in temptation's way. Nature revenged herself, and in less than three minutes the burglar watcher was as sound asleep as Beatrice across the hall. When she was aroused again the sunlight of another day shone through her little skylight, and Bonny was shouting from below stairs: "Hurrah! hurrah! Isabelle! Is-a-belle! Wake up and come down! Glory — magnificence — Hurry! No matter about clothes! Come!"

Next an onrush of small limbs up the winding staircase, and Robert bounded into the room to precipitate himself headlong upon his sister's bed. "Why don't you come, Belle? Here we've all been yelling at you like ever'thing! They's — My jimminy, Belle! Do you go to bed with your clothes on? I bet, if my mother knew that, she'd punish you! Eh? What's the matter? What makes you stare so?"

"Clothes? Why, is it morning?"

"Is it morning? I should say it's most noon! An' a wagon — But I won't tell. Only —









"WHY, FOLKS! WHAT'S ALL THIS?"



Mother! Belle went to bed in her clothes, an' they're all wrinkly up!"

"Go downstairs at once, Robert!" commanded the sister as sternly as she could, and dragged herself to the window. But from that side of the house nothing unusual was to be seen, and, beginning to think over her last night's fright, she smiled at her own plight. "Mother will be sure to ask why I did this, and my freshly ironed gown is sadly tumbled, after all. Humph! I wonder if I dreamed the whole thing!"

Ten minutes later, after a hasty toilet and freshening of her garb, she descended to the lower floor only to find it deserted and the whole family congregated on the west side of the house, gazing with surprise and perplexity upon a shining "express wagon" which stood there.

"Why, folks! what's all this?"

"That's exactly what we wish to find out," returned Mrs. Beckwith, turning a very smiling face toward her belated daughter. "Some fairies must have been at work here during the night, and we cannot guess who they are. Rather, we may guess, but I do not feel at all sure. See! isn't it really handsome?"

There was no mistaking that the vehicle was intended for one of them; for on the brand-new



curtains which covered its sides was plainly painted, "Parcel Express," and on the box of the wagon, at the back, a modest legend: "Beckwith, The Lindens, New Windsor, N. Y."

"Of course it's from the Brooks," asserted Isabelle, promptly.

"Of course it is n't," returned Beatrice, her feet beating a restless tattoo to her joyful thoughts, "because here is a note pinned to the cushion of the seat." And she tossed the other the paper, which each of the family had scrutinized in turn.

"To whom it may concern: This cart is for the young farmer. It does not come from either Mr. or Miss Brook, but from another well-wisher, who hopes it will be accepted in the same spirit with which it is offered.

"A FRIEND."

"A friend, I should think so!"

"Is n't it queer that none of us heard it brought here?" asked Roland, whose eyes were shining even more dazzlingly than the varnish of the "express" in the sunshine.

"But one of us did; I heard it," said Belle.

"And did n't tell us?"

"I thought it was burglars."

"Burglars! Pshaw! If you'd only looked out you might be able to tell who rolled the thing



here. I can't wait to know to whom I am indebted, to thank him or her. Mother, are you sure it is n't you?"

"Perfectly sure; besides, my son, you have asked me that question already a half-dozen times, and each time I have answered that I knew no more about the matter than you do. I wish I did; I don't quite like —"

"Now, Motherkin! Of course you will let us keep it! I know what you are thinking; but if my Laureate has enough sense to be willing to drive an 'Express Parcel' or a 'Parcel Express' for the good of the house of Beckwith, I hope you won't put rocks in his road!"

"It is from somebody who knew how much I wanted it; that is plain. It *must* be from the Brooks!"

"No, dears; I do not think they would stoop to a falsehood even to confer a kindness. At least, if they would, I am disappointed in them."

"Wull, wull, ain't we never goin' ter eat our breakfasses?" demanded Robert, suddenly.

"Yes, yes, indeed. For work-a-day folks we are very late. But, Isabelle, what is this about your sleeping in your clothes?"

"Oh, Mother, it seems awfully silly to tell!"



“No secrets in this household, Belle!” cautioned Bonny.

Thus adjured, the whole story came out, and it was many a long day before Isabelle heard the last of her going to bed to watch burglars.

Everybody would turn her or his chair at table so that the new possession was in sight, and their tongues wagged so continually that the meal was long protracted; and before it was through Mr. Dolloway had come across fields to pay his regular morning call. He had an unexpressed opinion that the “new family” would come to griefs indescribable if he did not keep a protecting guard over them.

“Hoity, toity! What’s this? What — in — the — world is this? Must be getting millionaires over here!” exclaimed the old man, in apparently intense surprise.

“Oh! Mr. Dolloway! Do *you* know anything about it?” cried Bonny, running to the window and leaning eagerly out.

“I never saw the thing in my life before.”

“You did n’t? Then away goes my last idea! Of course, if either Mr. or Miss Brook had given it, you would have known!”

Mr. Dolloway did not comment upon this opinion. He merely began to walk about the new



vehicle and examine it with the eye of a connoisseur in express wagons. "H'm-m! 'Pears to be purty well put together."

"Well put together!" exclaimed Roland, joining their visitor. "It's perfect. Whoever picked it out knew what was what!"

"Humph! I should like to know what you, a city feller, know about wagons!"

"Well, if I never owned one I have seen them by the thousands, yes, the millions, I suppose; and I know this looks exactly like those the dry-goods' houses send out. And the one at the last store I worked in might have been first cousin to the 'Beckwith.'"

"H'm-m! Sounds kind of top-lofty, don't it? You, a little, ign'runt sprat, a comin' into a town an' a settin' up a business that never was set up there afore!"

Roland was in too good humor to resent the unpleasant candor of his old neighbor, so he merely whistled a bar from the "Mikado," and went on to call Mr. Dolloway's attention to the various merits of his new possession.

"Humph! Hain't hitched her up yet, have you?"

"No; but I will, right away. Unless — Mother, is there anything I can do for you before I go to work?"



“Nothing, thank you, my son.”

Roland thereupon turned stableward, and his old friend walked with him, smiling grimly.

“I s’pose you don’t never forget to ask that question, do ye?”

“Not often. I don’t like to let my mother do any lifting if I can help it, and now that Bonny is away so much she might if I did n’t look after her.”

“H’m-m! That’s right. An’ I reckon you’re a purty level-headed kind of a chap, after all, if I do take you to do now and again; yes, yes, I do. So you hain’t *no* notion who gave you the wagon?”

“Unfortunately, no. Though, despite the neatly written note which declares to the contrary, and my mother’s faith in its assertion, I think it must be one or other of the kindly Brooks. You see we know nobody else hereabout who would trouble to be kind to us.”

“Hey, diddle diddle! You don’t, hey? Well, I guess them folks hain’t got a monopoly of all the goodness there is in the world!”

“That sounds as if you resented my thinking it was a gift from them!”

“An’ I do, lad, I do. I hain’t a claimin’ no superiority to your ma’s jedgment when I say



that she is old enough to look further than one family afore she gives up findin' out."

"Well, we must n't quarrel over it, anyway. Somebody, I do not know who, has been very, very generous to us; and I am too grateful and happy to question very deeply into the matter now. It is sure to come out, sooner or later. So I think, and I shall watch as sharply as I can for indications of the giver. Hello, Nan! You're in luck to-day! You're to try a brand-new business!"

There was a loud houp-la! and Robert had joined them. "Say, Mr. Dolloway! Don't you s'pose my chickens 'ill be out to-day?"

"Humph! I don't s'pose anything of the sort. But I am so everlasting tired of hearing about them that I fetched you over a brood already hatched out. What do ye say to that?"

"Gol — I mean — hurra! Did you? Honest Injun?"

"I ain't give to makin' no statements I don't mean."

"Where are they?"

"Where's the place for chickens, anyway?"

Off bounded the delighted lad, but half-way to the poultry-house turned and ran back again.

"Will you come with me, Mr. Dolloway?"



“H’m-m! Well, I guess I’ll get you taught some kind of manners if I keep on, I really do. In course I’ll come, an’ show you how to tend ’em. But I’ll tell you, first off, I hain’t goin’ to have any tomfoolery with ’em.”

“I — I dunno what you mean!”

“You don’t, hey?”

“No,” answered Robert, so honestly that the old man believed him.

“You may not know *now*, you may have forgot; but you knowed yest’day. What was you a-doin’ with a fish-line in the hen-house, hey?”

“It ain’t your hen-house! I mean — that’s sassy, but —”

“Ha, ha, ha!” chuckled the veteran. “Got caught, hain’t ye? S’posin’ I tell your ma?”

“Humph! I’d jest as soon tell her myself, only I forgot it. I will, the first time I remember. Anyhow, it did n’t do no harm!”

“What is it, Mr. Dolloway?” asked the widow, who made it a point herself to visit the poultry-house immediately after breakfast and see that the fowls were properly fed, and who now joined them there.

“Hello, Motherkin! I — yest’day — I — Wull, it did n’t do no harm.”

“’Tain’t so easy as you thought, eh, Bubby?”



“Easy ’nough. Yest’day I had some fun with the hens ; that’s all.”

“What kind of fun, Robert?”

“Wull, I had a fish-line, an’ you would n’t lemme fish, not fer fish ; so I fished fer hens, that’s all.”

“Fished — for — hens !”

“Yep. My cracky ! you’d ’a’ died a laughin’ ! I put the hook through a kernel of corn and throwed it to ’em, and they’d gobble at it like anything ! Then I’d pull ’em in ; but it mostly came out of their mouths before I landed ’em.”

“Robert Beckwith ! I can scarcely believe my own ears ! How *do* you learn such cruelty ? It must be born in you, though, for you certainly never copied it from your elder brother. In all his life I never knew Roland to wilfully hurt a creature of any kind ; but you —”

“Oh, Motherkin ! You would n’t scold your dear little boy fer a little thing like that, would you ? It did n’t hurt the hens, not a bit.”

“No, no ! It did n’t hurt the hens ; but why, you shaver ?” demanded Mr. Dolloway, who greatly enjoyed his small tormentor’s predicament, yet who really was growing very fond of him.

“ ’Cause a man — he come an’ told me to stop.



But I had some more fun 'at he did n't get onto, afterwards ! ”

Mrs. Beckwith sighed and dropped upon a bench. There were times when her “dear little boy ” tried her very soul.

“What else did you do ? ” demanded Mr. Dolloway, sternly.

“A boy come along an' I asked him in. That's p'lite, was n't it ? ”

“Robert, you are to invite no visitors without my knowledge.”

“Wull, I won't again, then. But you had n't told me, er I'd forgot. An' he showed me how to put 'em to sleep. You just take a hen er a chicken an' put its head under its wing fer it, an' shake it up lively — side to side, like, a keepin' its head tight under — an' you can stan' 'em up in reg'lar rows. When I get a lot I'm goin' to make 'em play soldier, that way. Soldiers asleep, though, they'd be, would n't they ? ”

“You'll do nothing of the kind with any of my hens an' chickens ! ” exclaimed Mr. Dolloway, hotly, and picking up the basket which contained the family of fluffy little creatures he had brought for a gift, he started toward the door.

“Please, Mr. Dolloway ! I'll be good ! I'll be as good as I can be ! Won't you leave 'em ? ”



Mrs. Beckwith knew how one feels to have a gift returned upon one's hands, and she quietly interposed: "Yes, Mr. Dolloway, please consider the matter for a moment. I assure you that I had no idea my boy was torturing the poor creatures committed to his charge, and I have always overlooked their feeding for myself. But, after hearing what I have just now, only one course is left to me. I now take the poultry away from Robert altogether. He will be allowed no further connection with this business; but if you can trust *me* with your pretty present, I will do my best to rear the chickens safely. Until a boy learns the first simple rule of 'doing as he would be done by,' he is unfit for any post of honor."

"That is spoke like a lady, as I always found you, Mrs. Beckwith; an' I think myself 'at Bobby is too young to be let have sech full swing, an' it'll do me proud to leave the brood to you." Saying which, the kind, if gruff old fellow bowed profoundly to the lady, but cast a withering glance upon his worsted foe.

"Mother, Mother! do you mean it? Ain't I no hen-keeper no more?"

"No, my dear; and it is your own fault that this is so."



## CHAPTER XIX.

### ROBERT'S HAPPY GUESS.

“ONLY six weeks at The Lindens and I feel as if it had been home forever!” cried Bonny, returning from her day of service in Mr. Brook’s study. “The old life in that Second Avenue flat seems like a dream.”

“That is the result of your busy life, my dear; and I am most sincerely thankful that our venture here does not really lose its charm for us, as time passes. We are all happier than Isabelle, though; and I regret her feeling more than I can say.”

“She’s trying ever so hard to be contented, Motherkin, and I hoped she was succeeding.”

“She will succeed. No honest effort ever failed of a certain success. She may never be as happy here as we are, however, for her nature is different. She craves luxuries and refinements which we could do without. I wish I could control them for her!” And Mrs. Beckwith sighed gently.



“Now, dearie, don’t go for to yearn for the moon. Be satisfied that so many of your brood are doing well, and maybe Isabelle will work out her own contentment some way. Oh! before I forget it and get bee-stung to the exclusion of other thoughts, Miss Joanna is to give a dinner-party to-morrow. She handed me the invitation for you and Belle yesterday, and I did n’t think to take it out of my pocket last night. You see, the bees were swarming, and that was all I wanted to do then.”

“My dear! and I suppose she expected an acceptance or the reverse this morning.”

“Yes; but I assured her you would come.”

“You had no right to do that, for I cannot avail myself of her kindness to this extent.”

“I should like to know why not?”

“Many reasons why not. I do not wish her to feel any compulsion in social matters, regarding us. We are not rich people, and all of the Brooks’ guests are. Our especial host and hostess would doubtless enjoy our coming, as they always seem to do, but I should not enjoy putting myself upon a false standing. My self-respect would not permit; though I will write a note at once, and one of you must take it across fields to Miss Brook.” Mrs. Beckwith rose as she spoke, and Beatrice



hastened to clasp her mother's waist with restraining arms.

"Please, Motherkin, I have n't finished my story; I had only begun. You know it takes forty times as many words for me to tell a thing in as for anybody else. Miss Joanna foresaw just this behavior on your part, Motherkin darling, so she was forearmed. She says she shall take it as positively unneighborly if you do not come. She wishes you to meet these 'old families,' folks who have been aristocrats so long that they have forgotten how to be snobbish, if they ever knew. You will enjoy them, and they you. Our friends were very, very emphatic in their urgency. But that is n't all; she wanted to know if I thought Isabelle would come over to-morrow early, and arrange her rooms for her. She says she has watched Belle, and everything she touches takes on a different look from what anybody else can give it. Of course, the old furniture is not to be disturbed. Miss Brook would as soon think of laying aside her own gray gown as banishing one stick of that venerable, upholstered stuff. But it's flowers and things; some new pictures, and—Motherkin! such a surprise! I'm not going to tell you—not even Miss Brook knows—but I hope with all the hope that is in me that my sister will not refuse to go."



“Certainly she will not refuse to do so simple a neighborly act for Miss Brook. The dining there is another matter.”

“All right; if she'll only go the first time, in the morning, that is all I ask. The rest will follow; it is positively certain. Will you ask her?”

“Yes. But are you going to the bees before supper?”

“I must. This is the time of greatest need for watching. Yet I'm tired! Hard work is n't all fun, is it, Motherkin? and I've worked awfully hard to-day!”

“More busily than usual?”

“It seems so. Good Mr. Brook does get so interested in his catalogue, and he is apparently so delighted with my superior merits as a secretary, that he forgets himself and would keep me writing right along till midnight, I believe, if it weren't for dear Miss Joanna or interfering Mr. Dolloway. By the way, Mother, something is wrong with that man. He's offended with the Beckwiths, root and branch. I fancied it was only his normal condition to be so 'all-fired' cross, but Mr. Brook informed me that he was suffering from a worse attack than common. He also hinted that we were responsible for it, and mentioned unappreciated kindness.”



“Why, Beatrice! I thought we had tried to express our gratitude continually. He is, in truth, very kind, though sometimes a bit officious, it seems to me. I do not suffer from this officiousness personally, but it annoys the others, especially Roland. The lad is trying so hard and is growing so manly and reliable that I can’t bear to have him fretted. However, I will try to be even more particular in future to express our obligation. If you are going among the hives now, call Robert to go with you. He is out of doors somewhere.”

Robert called himself, though, for he appeared at the open doorway with a very red face and an excited manner. “At it again, Bon! Hurry up an’ get your bee clothes on! I’ve got mine here! I do hope they ain’t a goin’ to swarm on top of no more trees, anyhow!”

“I thought you liked the danger of climbing to the top, Lieutenant!” returned Bonny, hastily donning her veil and gloves, and taking her long-handled net in her hand.

Robert also put on his protectors, in his haste getting the hat wrong side to the fore, and trying to wear the thumb of his glove on the back of his hand; but such trifling irregularities as these were nothing to him, and he followed his sister hastily.



“Alas! They aren’t going to light! And we’ve nothing to do but walk around after them and await their good pleasure!” cried Bonny, in disgust, after a half-hour’s loss of time.

“Pooh! I hate bees, anyway! An’ I guess I’ll give up the business!”

“‘Humpty-Dumpty’! Leave poor Bonny all alone?”

“Wull, wull, a body can’t work hisself to death, can he? Here I have to go ridin’ round all every other day with the ’spress wagon. Roland thinks he can’t get nothin’ done if I don’t go to hold the horse an’ pick up parcels, an’ — an’ — I’ll quit.”

“Pooh! your own self. You could n’t be hired to let that cart go out of the grounds without your small highness perched up in front. And if I had nothing to do but drive around the country three times a week and a little studying on the off days, I should think I was a lucky boy. Besides — There they go! Up with you! Softly, now! Oh dear! I wish I could climb as fast as you, and had as great a gift with bugs and things!” cried the sister, enviously.

Robert paused half-way up the trunk of the tree he was ascending, and cast an inquiring glance Bonnyward, but, seeing that she was really



sincere in her admiration, he condescended to proceed on his way. At last, in the "bee business" there did appear to be a fitting field for the restless boy's energy. Thus far he had been very faithful to his part of the work, the watching over the apiary—as they called their few hives of bees—during Beatrice's absence at Mr. Brook's; and the lesson he had learned by having his poultry taken away from him seemed fruitful of good results.

It was an hour later that the two young apiarists entered the dining-room and sat down to the delayed supper for which their appetites had been ready long before.

"Why, Motherkin! Strawberries? Where did you get them?"

"A gift, my dears! I saved them till you two came in, that we might eat them all together. Another gift from the generous, gruff Mr. Dalloway. He offered them in the oddest way. Said he had been to Newburgh to order some things for Miss Joanna, which could not be left for Roland's trip to-morrow, and saw these early berries in the market. He 'did n't know why we should n't eat strawberries early in the season as well as anybody else!' and more to the same point. I wish I knew what was the matter with



him, and he must indeed be very fond of some of us, if he continues to lavish kindnesses upon us, even while he believes he has reason to be offended. The strange, poor old man!"

They had none of them perceived a face looking in at the open window, for the lighted lamp upon their table left them illuminated while causing the world outside the window to remain in darkness; but, finally, a scraping *Ahem!* brought every glance about, and Robert paused with a spoonful of berries half raised toward his mouth.

"Hello! Who's there? Oh! Dolloway — Mr. Dolloway, I mean — what you doin' scarin' folks that way?"

"Hearin' my neighbors' honest opinion of me."

There was an awkward silence, which Mrs. Beckwith broke by saying gently: "You could not have heard anything inimical to you, Mr. Dolloway, though you must have learned our perplexity. Please come in, and share the feast you have so generously provided us. But, what is far more my desire, please explain frankly in what we have hurt your feelings or seemed ungrateful for all your neighborliness. Will you not?"

The old servant — for such he considered himself still, though he was treated quite as an



equal by nearly all who knew him — rarely refused a request of Mrs. Beckwith. He had come intending to sit an hour in that cheery “peace room,” and though he had been momentarily angered by hearing himself the subject of discussion, he now swallowed his pique and entered.

Robert jumped down from the table and ran with a dish of the fragrant fruit to the visitor, but was waved grimly away. “No, I don’t give things an’ then come an’ eat ’em up.” Nor could any persuasions prevail upon him to change his mind.

In almost any other household the situation would have been highly uncomfortable; for, as Belle fancied, Mr. Dolloway sat jealously watching every morsel vanish, and looking as if he had conferred an everlasting obligation upon them all; but they were too really sincere in their liking for the odd old man and too busily occupied with their own interests to pay really much attention to this.

Suddenly the guest demanded, “Goin’ parcel-lin’ to-morrow, young man?”

“Yes, sir; I expect to do so.”

“H’m-m! Like the wagon, I s’pose?”

“I do like it very much. It is perfect for my business, so light and yet so strong; and the can-



vas cover makes such a good shelter from rain in case of these sudden showers."

"H'm-m!" said Mr. Dolloway, gruffly, "h'm-m!"

Robert, having devoured all that he could find, now concluded that he was satisfied with his supper, and leaving his place crossed over to the lounge and perched himself beside Mr. Dolloway. "Say, I bet *you* know who give us that wagon!"

The old fellow fairly jumped. "What's that you say? What's that?"

"I said I just bet a sixpence you know who give it to us! I — Ginger! I — Mr. Dolloway — did n't *you* do it yourself?"

One could certainly have heard a pin drop, in the silence which succeeded this question. Then the guest cried sharply, "What makes you so much quicker witted than the rest o' your folks?"

"Mr. Dolloway! Is it possible? Has Robert really guessed the truth?" asked Roland, hurrying to the old man's side.

"I hain't nothin' to say. I hain't a single thing to say."

"Just yes or no? Please, just yes or no!"

"Well, s'posin' I do. What better off will you all be then?"

"This much better, that we shall at length



have a chance to thank the real donor. I have tried again and again to make Mr. Brook acknowledge that he was our benefactor, but in that respect he has as steadily denied the charge. But he, too, has intimated that we ought to know who had been good to us. And — I never thought of you! I — *Is it you, Mr. Dolloway?* ”

Queer old man! All the anger and gruffness disappeared from his manner instantly. His spare face softened and grew genial, his eyes beamed, his smile became cheery. Still, not until Robert had climbed upon his lap and with eager arms clasped about his neck had declared positively, “I know it’s you just the same’s if I saw you, you can’t fool me any longer!” did the truth out.

“Well, I thought it was a pity, seein’ you young folks so smart and ambitious, that you did n’t have more of a lift. I know it ain’t my master’s way to give things outright. He says folks don’t gen’ally like it; but if I give I give, an’ that’s all they is to it.”

“But, dear Mr. Dolloway, why did you so mislead us? You said you had never seen that wagon before you came over here the morning when we found it!”

“An’ I told you the gospel truth. I never had.”



“But you did give it to us?”

“I — I — s’pose I did, seein’ as you ask me square.”

The delayed thanks were now offered with double earnestness, and each word of gratitude was balm to the wounded spirit of the lonely old man.

“I s’pose you think it queer o’ me, ma’am, to have showed so much feelin’ ’bout a trifle like that. But I don’t lay no claim to perfection. I like to give things, but — I like to be thanked for ’em when I do. I s’pose that ’s carnal human natur’, but it’s the truth. An’ I did enjoy the surprise of you all, a plaguy sight; but when you got to thinkin’, an’ nothin’ didn’t seem to alter the notion ’at nobody ’ceptin’ Mr. Brook or his sister could do a generous action, I was mad. I ain’t nobody but a servin’-man, an’ I don’t make no pretence. But I am what I am, in the right place, or the Lord would n’t ’a’put me there. An’ ’cause I am a servant don’t hender my givin’ a present, now and again, if I want to, does it?”

“In one way — no. But, my dear sir, I feel as if this were too rich a gift. You may have let your generosity silence your prudence. Ought you to do so much for us? I hope you understand I mean this just as gratefully.”



“I do understand you, ma’am. An’ I will say that I never met a lady as was as considerate of the feelin’s of others as you be. Not even exceptin’ Miss Brook, as is a lady every inch of her. But you need n’t worry about the cost of that wagon. It didn’t take but one month’s wages to pay for it. A pity I couldn’t do that much for old Mr. Conrad’s sake. Though he was young Mr. Conrad when I knew him; and many’s the bout we all have had together, — Master and him an’ me. ‘Waive formality for once,’ Master’d say; an’ down we’d sit to as big a dinner as the city of New York could furnish. You see fellows that was Forty-Niners together did get a little mixed up as to who was boss and who was n’t when they got to talkin’ over old times. Nothin’ like a ‘Vigilance Committee’ to take the nonsense out o’ folks, I tell you!”

Once started on his Californian reminiscences, experience had taught them that Mr. Dolloway rarely left the theme till actually forced to do so; and Bonny, foreseeing an extra dose of “California” coming now, interrupted the discussion promptly. “Who did buy the wagon if you did not?”

“Mr. Brook, Mr. Brook himself. I didn’t like to trust his judgment in the matter, but I



had to. I had the rheumatiz that day, an' he was goin' into town, so he selected it. Then the wagon-makers fixed it up fresh and sent it down. It was a brand-new one, though. It wasn't none of your 'second hands.' Was you a-thinkin' it was?"

"We did not think so for a minute. We knew it must be a new one."

"An' business is fa'rly successful, ain't it?"

"I think it is splendid. I am earning about three dollars a trip now, clear profit; and I think I shall do still better later in the season, when more of the city people get out here to their country homes. You see, I flatter myself that I know how to do an errand well. I try to be exact, and I know — of two things — which seems the newer or better. I owe that to my late city training. Yes, I shall build up a really profitable business, soon. Then I sell already a good many early vegetables. I have sold all of one crop of pease, and have the second one coming on. It is 'the early bird catches the worm' in the green-grocer or market-gardener business, in truth. By and by, when the people get their own gardens growing, my stock may have to go begging for a purchaser."

"Humph! Then I suppose you'll let us have



at least a smell of the pease-pods!" exclaimed Bonny, laughing. "So far, I assure you, Mr. Dolloway, the enjoyment *we* have had in our 'early vegetables' has been the satisfaction of seeing them grow. But I have been more generous. I have given the family enough honey to make each member of it sick!"

"Which was a long look ahead, my friend! Because the family appetite is now cloyed, and honey may be left safely anywhere about without fear of its diminishing in quantity."

Mr. Dolloway laughed as heartily as the others, and, having stayed long enough to "beat that young whipper-snapper of a Robert terribly" over a game of checkers, departed homeward, in high good humor with himself and all the world.

"How funny! If I had given anybody a surprise gift I don't believe I'd be angry if it proved the surprise!" exclaimed Roland, as he closed the windows for the night.

"Don't be too sure, my son. Almost everybody likes to be thanked for kindnesses conferred, and Mr. Dolloway is an old man, to whom all events are now great ones. The thing which worries me is his using his money, he a wage-earner himself, for us. It doesn't seem right."

"Don't worry about that, Motherkin. I have



heard Mr. Brook say that his 'man' has several thousand dollars in the bank. You see he gets forty dollars a month, and his 'keep.' Besides that he has his clothing given him, and he has no relatives of whom he knows. I think my employer told me these facts, in view of our feeling just this way about the wagon. It really will not hurt Mr. Dolloway to use some of his money, for they will always take care of him, anyway."

"Well, it must rest as it is for the present. Only let each be carefully polite and attentive to the poor old fellow, that he may fully understand we do appreciate our obligations to him."

"Yes, Motherkin. But there's somebody else who, I fancy, is deserving of some gratitude, — Mr. 'Humpty-Dumpty'! But for his brightness we should still be at odds with our humble patron! All in favor of thanking the Lieutenant of the Bee Squad, say, Aye!"

"Aye!" "Aye!"

"Yes, really, thank you, my little boy."

"Don't mention it!" returned Robert, with a complete imitation of grown-ups and with his own inimitable little swagger.

Whereupon everybody laughed again, and Bonny moved the piano-stool into place for her mother's use.



“Belle, I always like to have something nice to go to sleep on,—to think of, I mean, the last thing at night; so I want you to hear. You are to go over to Miss Brook’s in the morning; and you are going to be the very proudest, most delighted young woman in Orange County!”

So cried Bonny, tiptoeing into her sister’s room late that night, and rousing that tired maiden from her first nap.

“Why, Beatrice! I was asleep. Have n’t you been in bed yet?”

“No; I was doing some bee sums. If one hive of bees —”

“Oh! I protest!”

“If all the other members of the family are happy bread-winners and money-getters, why shouldn’t the ‘belle’ of the family be one, too? Answer to that conundrum in the morning at the residence of Miss Joanna Brook, spinster.”



## CHAPTER XX.

### WISTARIA.

“**W**HAT a fine, substantial, aristocratic-looking old place it is!”

Isabelle's thoughts, as she moved slowly up the long driveway to the Brook mansion, were almost envious. She had come across fields to fulfil the neighborly office which Miss Joanna had begged, and she had attached little importance to Bonny's prophecy of a “delightful surprise” awaiting her.

Indeed, what would have made Beatrice extravagantly happy would have scarcely appealed to Isabelle at all. The elder girl was fighting valiantly to “down discontent,” but so far her efforts had not been crowned with marked success. To accept the simple life which God had ordered for her was a bitter trial. She was not the first who has imagined it would “be easy to do just right if —” in some other way one could arrange one's life.

“Why couldn't I have been born in such a home? Why need my mother toil as she does?”



And Roland, Bonny, even little Bob, has to think each day how best to increase the family income; while these old people, at the very end of life, have ten thousand times more than they can use or enjoy."

It was, indeed, a "fine old place," rich with the accumulations of nearly a century of ownership by the same, always wealthy family. It stood "four square to all the winds that blew," its back and front so exactly alike that it could not be said to put its "finest to the world." On either end, immense fluted columns rose to the roof, which, extending over the wide veranda thus formed, gave protection to those who would enjoy these "out-of-door rooms."

The east veranda looked toward the river, the west upon the tree-lined avenue which led from the road, a quarter of a mile distant, through the park to the mansion. On either side, also, were gay parterres of choicest flowers, while a "maze" of old-time box borders invited the curious to tread its quaintly constructed paths for a full mile of windings in and out, before one could emerge on the northern side, and upon a well-kept bridle-road, which led through the great forest on the bluff, down its sides to the river, the old "embankments" and the well-preserved his-



toric reminders of a day when the Chidly Brooks "had fought and bled for freedom's cause."

The stables and outbuildings were well to the south of the mansion, and on that side were also the kitchen offices, which in this well-ordered establishment were as freely open to inspection as any other part of Miss Joanna's "kingdom."

"Ah! my dear! It is good of you to come so early! That is exactly what I like: plenty of time to do things neatly and completely."

"But, dear Miss Brook! you are so quick and active I should think you would not ever take much time for anything! You are certainly twice as spry as I am!" responded Isabelle, surprised from her reverie by the salutation of her white-haired neighbor.

"I don't know about that! I don't know about that! I do know that the only way of making haste which I understand is to take such thought beforehand that I rarely make one blundering movement. I have never had time, even in my long life, to 'hurry,' but I have managed to accomplish about all I have set out to do."

"And I do try to 'hurry,' but never succeed! I am slow-motioned — a dreamer, my mother tells me; and once in a while I get so behindhand that I put on steam and then — a smash up!"



“Give it up, my child, give it up at once. Learn to use forethought instead of haste and you’ll be thankful all your life for doing so. But, dearie me! how old lips do love to preach, and how distasteful it is to young ears to listen! No, no, my child. I do not think you are impatient. It is only that I remember so distinctly how I disliked to learn of anybody in this world — except Joanna Brook! But come in, come in. I have as many of these May roses as I think we can use. The others we will cut after these are in place. Did you ever see this earth more lovely than it is this very morning? Oh, what a God! what a loving, generous God!”

Isabelle looked up swiftly into the sweet old face, before her. She was sometimes startled by these sudden outbursts of feeling on Miss Joanna’s part; a person who ordinarily never “preached,” but who seemed so full to overflowing of the love of God that her natural speech became, at times, as the speech of an alien.

“I suppose He is,” answered the girl, slowly.

Miss Brook darted a glance into the beautiful face of the girl, and opened her lips quickly; but the words she would have said she altered to the quiet remark: “If you do not know, but only ‘suppose,’ you will know some day. You would



know now if it were His will. But come in. Let us begin at the front parlor first."

They ascended the steps and entered the great hall, which ran through the main floor of the house from back to front. Each entrance door stood widely open, and the outlook either way was entrancing. Isabelle forgot to be regretful for her own privations in the enjoyment of that scene.

"How lovely! This would make such a pretty picture, if one might put it on canvas. This great hall, with the curious staircase, the old-time furniture, and that big, hospitable vista beyond! May I sketch it sometime, Miss Joanna?"

"Yes, indeed! And we would feel honored. Ah! those old outside galleries,—galleries we called them, when I was young,—many's the cotillon has been danced upon them, many the tea-party gathered there. See this table! It is a century and a half old. It is only about four feet in diameter, yet eighteen people have gathered about that bit of mahogany to drink a cup of tea, when tea was tea, my dear! These are the cups; they were my grandmother's. See?"

The old lady stepped to a cabinet and took out a tiny cup and saucer of delicate china, thin as



an egg-shell and no larger than the smaller end of one. "I often sit and muse over those old times. I can imagine the whole scene so well, and sometimes I almost find myself talking gossip with the dead-and-gone dames who drank to the success of 'the army' in these same bits of cups. I must show you my grandmother's gowns and things some day, my dear; I think you would enjoy seeing them, even trying them on, if you like. Eh?"

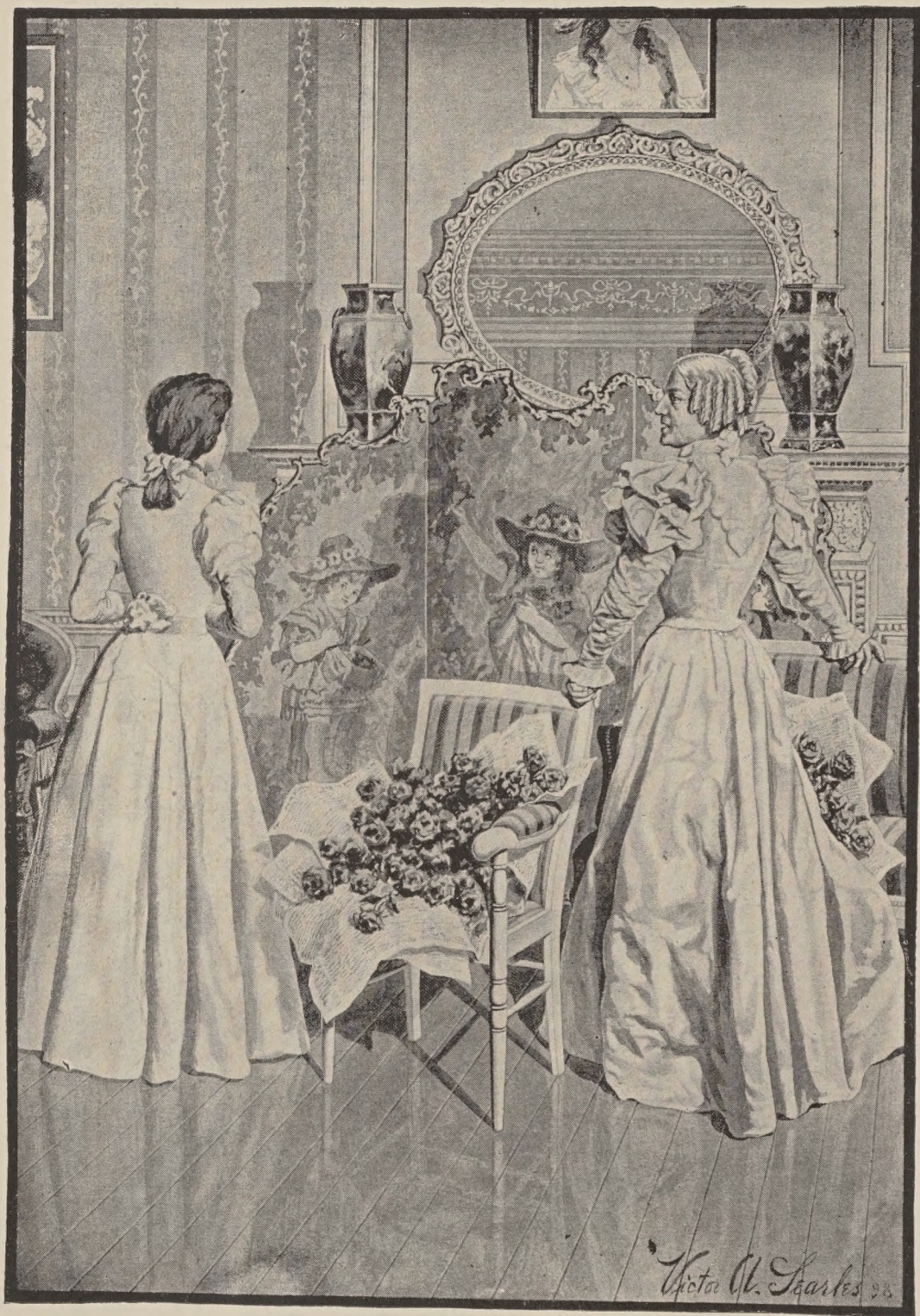
A moment's thought flashed through Isabelle's brain. Here were artistic possibilities open to her that the city could not have furnished, and her discontent vanished entirely. "I should be very grateful, dear Miss Brook! It would be a treasure-trove to me! But sometime, after I have worked very, very faithfully to do better things than I ever have accomplished, will you sit to me for a sketch? It sounds like the greatest presumption, yet would you?"

"Would I? Would I not? I should be delighted! Make a trial right away, to-morrow if you can. I should love to give a new picture of myself to Chidly. The last one I had painted was when I was middle-aged, in 'my prime' some flatterers said, 'neither hay nor grass,' I said. I had outgrown the dimples of youth and









"THERE WAS NO ANSWER, AND MISS JOANNA TURNED ABOUT SWIFTLY."



I had not acquired the finish of age. I'm in my prime now, I fancy, as near as I ever shall be until God sends Azrael to lay the touch of perfect peace upon my restless lips."

She led the way without another word into the wide eastern drawing-room, and threw open the shutters to let in the morning sunshine.

"Here you are, my child, free to do exactly as you please. Make the rooms as pretty as you can, and I begin with this first, because it is chief. You can call for one of the men to cut as many flowers as you like. The bushes and trees are loaded with blossoms now. And, oh! here is something you will like, at least I hope so. A gift from the daughter of a dear old friend, herself as noble a woman as ever drew breath though she couldn't help be that, with such a mother! The girl—dear me! she's fifty, if a day, but a girl to me always!—this girl is manager of one of the art rooms in the city, and she brought me this for a birthday gift from there. Isn't it pretty?"

There was no answer, and Miss Joanna turned about swiftly. She was a woman who liked others to share her enthusiasms.

Isabelle was straining with clasped hands and parted lips, gazing amazedly upon a threefold



screen shielding the hearthplace. The panels bore each a female figure, but the central one was that which had engrossed the young artist's attention to the exclusion of the others; and its design was a golden-haired child in a delicate drapery of heliotrope tint reaching upward to pull the bunches of wistaria blooms from a vine wreathed above her head. The scheme of the coloring, even to the framing of the screen, was of heliotrope and gold, and the effect was of indescribable light and joy.

"Ah! I see you like it! We think it is beautiful, beautiful! and my friend says that though they do not know the artist's name now, the Art Directors will make every effort to hunt her up and help her on; for I suppose it must be a woman, since this is a Women's Society."

Still Isabelle did not speak, her words seemed utterly to have deserted her; but there was one at hand who was never at a loss for language, and with a rush and whirl Beatrice came waltzing into the great room, her eyes dancing as gayly as her feet, and her lips bubbling over with laughter.

"Oh! I couldn't stand it any longer! I thought I should just burst with impatience, so I told Mr. Brook he would have to excuse me a minute, whether or no, and here I am! Now,



Miss Isabelle Beckwith, what have you to say for yourself? Didn't I have a surprise for you, and isn't it just too glorious to be true?"

"I—I can't believe it! Even yet!"

"Well, I should like to know what has come over you two children!" exclaimed Miss Joanna, utterly at sea for an explanation of this odd behavior.

Bonny stopped dancing, went up to her sister, threw her arms impulsively about Isabelle's neck, and kissed her heartily. Then she asked, "Shall I tell her, or will you, dear?"

Belle blushed a little, but her eyes shone with pride as she turned toward Miss Brook. "Since I have heard your opinion of the panel when you did not know who painted it, I suppose I may tell you that your words made me very proud. That 'Wistaria' is my own work."

"My goodness! Is it possible! And to think that I never dreamed it! Yet why should I? The only signature anywhere about the picture is a blade of grass in one corner."

"Yes," laughed Isabelle, now as gay as she had been speechless before, "that was the only one I dared use. I am such a mere beginner in art, that I feel as if I really know nothing yet! Only I feel it within me—strong, strong, strong!"



—that I shall sometime be able to put a little of myself, my dreams and ambitions, into visible form! Oh! I am so grateful and so humble. I am ready now, dear Miss Joanna, to say with you, ‘God is so loving, so generous!’”

There was silence in the room for a moment, during which Bonny’s dark eyes filled with an unwonted moisture; and rather than “sprinkle down the occasion” she stole quietly away and to her own duty in that big study, where natural history and she had such a tussle daily to understand each other, but where a growing friendship had been established between them under the wise instruction of Philipse Chidly Brook, Esquire.

Beatrice’s departure broke the spell, and Miss Joanna moved swiftly forward and clasped the trembling, success-humbled Isabelle in her kindly arms. “Ah! my dear, if you can take your good fortune in such guise, all things will be possible to you. I envy you; yes, even if it is wicked! The feeling in your heart at this moment must be so exquisite! To be conscious of one’s own power to transcribe a little of this wonderful beauty all about us so that other eyes may read its secret too, and to be assured that the dear God is approving by helping one as He has helped



you now, must be happiness indeed ! My darling, I congratulate you with all my heart ! ”

Belle looked up with glistening eyes. Where was now the envy that had tormented her soul as she had approached that house but a few moments before ? Gone utterly. For ten times the wealth and pride of all the Brooks who ever lived in those stately old rooms she would not have given up one iota of the pure joy which now thrilled her heart.

“ Dear lady, a bit of a while ago it was I who was envious. Now I wouldn't change places with you for the world ! But, dear me ! how horrid that sounds ! ”

“ No, no, no. Let it stand ! You are like a young queen who has known all along that her blood was royal, but whom the world has not acknowledged. Now you are free to enter into your kingdom. In the name of the people, welcome ! See to it, crowned one, that you always, as now, reverence your high estate ! ”

Miss Joanna kissed the girl gently on her white brow, then moved quietly away ; and Isabelle looked after her wonderingly. “ I did not dream that she had all that romance and fine feeling in her alert, practical nature ! Well, I shall know a new Miss Joanna now, and love her



dearly, dearly ! But I came over here to work, not to dream ; and though I am so glad I can hardly keep still, I will do, exactly as Motherkin would bid me, ‘the task that lies nearest the best that I can.’ ”

Certainly no rooms were ever arranged with more loving delicacy of touch and judgment than were these old parlors for Miss Brook’s dinner-party ; and when all was finished and Isabelle free at length to go home, she approached her old friend with something of timidity in her air.

“ Miss Joanna, may I speak with you a moment ? ”

“ An hour, if you will. It would take all that to express my pleasure in everything, yourself included, if I were to try to put it into words.”

“ Then will you understand me exactly, when I say, something, maybe queer — ”

“ My dear, we have taken a peep each into the other’s soul this morning. I am certain there will be no misunderstanding. You may say all you wish.”

But even wise Miss Brook was not wholly prepared for what was forthcoming, though secretly rejoiced at it.

“ Well, you see, all of us, except myself, have some way of earning money ; there does not



seem to be anything especial I can do, unless — This arranging your rooms has put an idea into my head. Do you think some of the other rich families about here, the ‘summer folks’ and all, would give me an opportunity to help them get ready for their social gatherings, as I have done for you? I want, this is what you must certainly understand, I want to always fix your things if you will let me, because it is the only way I can show — No, that is n’t it! Because I love you! You have from the first seemed to like me, and I have been so glad of it. Bonny is so bright, and Roland so manly and good, and little Bob so — ”

“The least said about little Bob the better!” cried the old lady, smiling so brightly that Isabelle was quite reassured. “We all love the little scamp who teases the patience out of us a dozen times a day.”

“But for these other people, if I — who do understand the value of beautiful things, even if I don’t own them — could take care of their bric-à-brac, put their apartments in order after the maids have done their sweepings, and as I imagine few servants are trained to do, at a small price per hour, I should be very glad to do it.”

Miss Brook put on her spectacles and looked



fixedly at her young neighbor. "My dear, they said you were the proud one of the family."

"So I am."

"And yet you realize what you are asking?"

"Perfectly. It will be putting myself in a servant's place."

"I fancied you were even a little ashamed to have your brother drive the 'Parcel Express.'"

"I was ashamed of everything."

"Well!"

"Now I am only ashamed of myself, ashamed of the ignoble shame I felt then."

"But the artist in you? Will you not be coining money by that talent soon?"

"I think not. Those who do the best work are the least appreciated for a while. It has been so in so many lives of real artists. No, indeed, I am not dazzled by the sale of one panel! 'One swallow does n't make a summer.' And if I can earn money in some other way, I can — I can keep my soul clean. I need never earn 'pot-boilers' by a desecration of what little power I possess, but I can always keep that channel to expand in. Does that sound very presumptuous and conceited in me?"

"It sounds as I wish thousands of other workers felt. We should have truer pictures,



finer statues, loftier literature, if the greed for money were kept out of the question. You are right. Roland is right. If he is a poet, he will not be debarred his privilege to sing because he ploughs the field or drives the 'Parcel Express.' If you are an artist, you will work out your beautiful conception none the less because you have to live in industry, not idleness. My child, I shall always call upon you to help me gratuitously; but you shall help my neighbors at the rate of thirty cents an hour! Do I understand you, think?"

Isabelle gave a quick, warm embrace to the kind creature beside her, and, her task being done, escaped before she betrayed herself into any more sentiment.

It was a very different girl who bounded homewards over the sun-dried grass than she who had moved wearily, almost despondently, along the regular paths a few hours before, and her heart rejoiced at sight of her mother's face watching for her from the kitchen door.

"Ah! the dear Motherkin! I can hardly wait to tell her. She will be as glad, almost more glad than I!"

But what is that? At first sight of her daughter's form approaching The Lindens, Mrs. Beck-



with had hurried forward, waving a strip of paper above her head. She seemed quite as excited and eager as Isabelle herself; and as soon as they had come within hailing distance, two shouts crossed each other on the sun-lighted air.

“My daughter, good news, good news! A check — for you!”

“Oh, Motherkin! I was never so happy in my life!”



## CHAPTER XXI.

THREE YEARS LATER. — THE RESULT.

**T**HREE years have passed since Isabelle ran gayly over the fields to greet her mother and to receive the first money she had ever earned in her life.

The little check made out in her mother's name for "the unknown painter of the Wistaria panel" had been used to supply its possessor with an assortment of the best dusters, brushes, and chamois appliances for the care of bric-à-brac and articles of vertu, and the balance had been expended in colors and canvases.

Miss Joanna had been as good as her word. The dinner-party had been a complete success, with Mrs. Beckwith and her elder daughter among the guests, and with no end of admiring phrases concerning the graceful decorations of the old house falling upon the decorator's grateful ears. Whereupon Miss Brook had started the ball rolling in a quiet way, and within a few days Isabelle had already been called upon three



times to "help" some distracted hostess prepare for a social entertainment.

Those who called upon her once, invariably did so the second time; and before the end of her "first season," as Bonny teasingly called her sister's early experiments, Miss Beckwith had become the fashion, but, fortunately, a "fashion" so thoroughly useful and agreeable that she was destined to outlive the common existence of "fads" and to be looked upon as a necessity in New Windsor festivities.

Now three years had slipped away. "Almost imperceptibly, isn't it, Motherkin? We have been, we always are, so busy that it doesn't seem any time from one spring to another;" and there was to be a little dinner-party at The Lindens itself.

"The list of guests is a short one, but big enough to cover our dearest friends, after all; and that's all a body, a work-a-day body, wants of any company. If we hadn't 'waived formality for once' and invited Mr. Dolloway to dine with his 'betters,' we should have had an odd number at table, and if there's anything I dislike it is a lop-sided table."

"Come, Beatrice! No trespassing on my preserves! I am the judge of what a table should be,



and if our third guest had proved as 'contrary' as I fully expected, I was going to crown my eighth chair with laurel and set it up to the 'Success of The Lindens and the Family Industry!' However, I'd rather see a happy human face at the table's foot than any laurel wreath; and there they all come!" As she spoke, Isabelle gave a satisfied glance about the "peace room," and the banquet therein prepared.

"I don't wonder you're proud, Belle! Every dish of which we shall partake has been prepared by your own fingers, as well as almost all the lovely things in this room, except, of course, my masterpiece of honey. The Bees, the Lieutenant, and your Humble Servant claim credit for that golden pyramid! Ah, yes, and the Eggs, and the Chickens, and the Boned Turkey, — these are the Motherkin's! But all the rest — They're at the door, dear! Come and receive them."

Arm in arm the sisters passed to the wide porch, and stood there smiling welcome upon the three aged figures which came slowly up the driveway.

"Ah, ha, my dears! That's what I like! A welcome at the open door! That's hearty and old-fashioned, and as it should be. Between



friends, my dears, between friends. Of course, in a stately assemblage one must do as custom dictates. And may I be allowed to pay you both a bit of a compliment on this happy occasion ! ”

“ Allowed or not, brother Chidly, you are certain to pay it ; but they ’ll bear it. They ’ll bear it without spoiling by it,” said Miss Joanna, gayly. “ Once in a way it does no harm to tell a girl she ’s pretty, when the beauty is offset, as in our dear ones here, by such good common-sense. Three years, is it ? Three days it almost seems to me ! Time goes so fast when one is old ; though I ’m not really old yet, am I ? Nor Chidly here, nor Dolloway, who consented, at last, to sit down to our feast with us. Ah ! here ’s the Mother ! ”

At this moment Mrs. Beckwith — one had to look twice to be sure that this round, plump matron was really the once fragile Mrs. Beckwith — appeared to add her welcome to her daughters’. She leaned proudly, as any mother might, upon the arm of a tall, broad-shouldered youth of twenty, whose upper lip had just become interesting to himself and an unfailing source of amusement to Mistress Beatrice ! But the air of real manliness, the honest courage and determination of the bright eyes under the heavy brows,



told of a character strong enough to afford an occasional weakness, even to suspecting a mustache where mustache there was none.

On the mother's other side walked Robert, for once separated from the rifle which had been his latest gift from the adoring Mr. Dolloway, who declared again and again — and nobody had the heart to contradict him — that if it had not been for that now historic “spanking,” administered upon the occasion of his first meeting with “Humpty-Dumpty,” a valuable citizen would have been lost to the world.

Did “Bob” resent this? Not a bit. He had long since learned to look upon his old comrade as the most delightful, generous, indulgent person in existence; and he now forsook his mother to clap Mr. Dolloway upon the shoulder, exclaiming: “Say, Partner! Why did n’t you take that honey out of that hive last night? If we’re going to let you share in the business, you must n’t expect to shirk, you know.”

“Robert! that is impertinent.”

“Well, I don’t mean it that way. Partner knows. But he told me to go off and practise shooting at that sardine box on the lane gate-post and he’d tend to the honey things for Bon. But he did n’t, and *I* got the lecture ’stead of *him*.”



“Well,” retorts “the partner,” “I had to watch the way you scored, did n’t I? If I had n’t you’d ’a’ claimed more’n I had myself! I was n’t going to allow that, you may believe!”

The others exchanged smiles. If there was any among the group who showed signs of that second childhood which is given to great age, it was gruff, kindly, honest old John. He did not feel, he rarely appeared, any older than his young and constant companion. He still “served” Mr. Brook, but would have been dumfounded had that generous old “master” actually requested any service; and it was a saying in the neighborhood that “Dolloway owned the whole Brook household.” Which was not quite true; though this is true, that Mr. Chidly and Miss Joanna, feeling profoundly grateful for the wonderful vitality and soundness of intellect with which a good God and right living had blessed their own old age, felt also a parental interest and care over the more restricted powers of this venerable, faithful friend.

“The bees! I haven’t seen the apiary for a week!” exclaimed Mr. Brook. “If it will not delay our hostess, let us visit that before the busy workers have retired for the night. I am never tired, never, of watching these tiny creatures, nor of learning from them. By the way, Beatrice, that



little article of yours on 'The Mechanism of the Bee's Sting' has just been published in the 'Magazine of Natural History' for this month. Did you know it?"

Bonny made a little grimace, and pointed proudly toward the orderly city of hives, which now really deserved the name of apiary, and which had acquired a reputation throughout many States, so that the "Beckwith" supplies of all sorts of bee-stock were in good demand among the markets; which was only the beginning of what this ambitious girl of seventeen hoped to accomplish. "For I will not stop, if I can possibly help it, till I have earned and saved enough to give my little brother a college education. The rest of us have had to do without, but there's no reason why we shouldn't have one scholar in the family!"

To which Robert listened with perfect complacency and the reflection that if he did "go to college he'd be the champion of the football team, anyhow!"

He bade fair to excel in anything athletic, certainly, and, for Bonny's sake, let us hope he will in things scholastic. He did, indeed, stand at the head of his class at the public school he attended, and his mathematical powers were excellent. But, at his age, there is no calculating with exactness



what he may prove to be in the years to come.

As they turned houseward again, after a close inspection of the well-kept apiary, Mrs. Beckwith slipped an arm about her younger daughter's waist. "What is this I hear, dearie? Have you taken to writing for the press?"

"If I had, Motherkin, I should have had to tell you at once. But it was this way: Mr. Brook is kind enough to say I can put things quite clearly on paper, with my little typewriter; and I happened to please him with some notes I made. So nothing would answer but I must write them out more fully and let him send them to the magazine he mentioned. Of course, they would n't refuse to publish anything *he* sent! So — that's all there is to that story! Therefore, little Madam, don't lay the flattering unction to your soul that you are the parent of a literary creature. You are not; only of a common-sense, happy, healthy, hard-working little girl!"

There was a close pressure of the hand, and Mrs. Beckwith rejoined her guests. Talk about queens! That little woman, with the soft gray hair and the loving smile upon her lips, thought that there was never a human being so rich and so blessed as she.



In five minutes more they were all seated at the well-arranged table, the sight of which, Miss Joanna declared, "would give even a dyspeptic an appetite!"

Yet Mr. Brook's eyes wandered about the apartment curiously. "I never enter this room but I find something new in it to admire. Joanna, look behind you, please!"

Miss Brook wheeled swiftly about. What Chidly discovered admirable was always doubly so to his sister.

"The chrysanthemum tapestry! The dream embodied at last!"

Just as her children wished, there hung upon the wall beside the wide hearthplace, "where somebody could appreciate it," the vision Mrs. Beckwith had seen in Mr. Brook's basket of chrysanthemums so long ago.

"Until to-day, a secret even from us, for whom she wrought it all!" cried Isabelle, eagerly. "Is n't it beautiful? Is n't it perfect?"

Mr. Dolloway's opinion had not yet been called for; but he was "the privileged member" everywhere, and he coolly left the table, putting on his horn-bowed spectacles as he did so. "Well, Master, I thought I was right, even without my glasses! But I will say them is the best picters



you an' Miss Brook has ever had took! Who done 'em?"

"Who could do them, who could use a needle so exquisitely, who in this world, but our own blessed little mother?" answered Bonny, enthusiastically.

"The needle! you don't tell me them faces is *sewed*?"

"Certainly. Every particle of the work is done with a needle, — the needle of a genius! her children think."

"An' I should think they might!" returned the old man, fixing his eyes solemnly upon Mrs. Beckwith, who had always had his highest veneration, but who now seemed to have been suddenly lifted off from the common earth and placed upon a pedestal; and so overwhelmed in thought was he that he began to eat his dinner without a word, even one "reminiscence" of his beloved "California."

"Well, my dears, are you all satisfied, quite satisfied, with our experiment?" asked Mr. Brook, as they finally grouped about the fireplace, preparatory to saying good-night. "Three years must have proved the wisdom of it, seems to me."

"Indeed, it has, dear friend. We are all well, happy, and I believe useful. Isabelle has, through



her domestic talents, — the very last she dreamed that she possessed three years ago, — found entrance into the households of the rich, and has there learned that no amount of money can give happiness. She has by a despised faculty been enabled to cultivate her highest; and it is one of the good things we have to tell you to-night, that her last picture will be hung, ‘on its own merits’ *and on the line!* at the forthcoming exhibition in the National Gallery. This coming year she proposes to go into town regularly for the instruction which she desires, and which her ‘servant wages’ will pay for. But, Roland, speak for yourself. Mother does not wish to monopolize the talk.”

“I have nothing to tell, Motherkin, except that I have had a few bits of verse accepted at the *Criterion*, and am therefore satisfied that it was a golden opportunity you offered me of coming into the country and learning to be — a man! And I am grateful for the hard work which kept me from writing trash till I could write some simple thing the people would care to hear.”

“An’ I — I have got a hundred dollars in the bank!” cried Robert “the mercenary,” at which all laughed.



“How about you, my Bonny? Do you regret that the only chance you have to sing is in the house of God and in your own home?”

“Surely,” exclaimed Miss Joanna, “she cannot regret that! For, if she did but know it, more people come to church of a Sunday to hear her rich young voice in her solos than to hear the pastor’s sermon. The one last Sabbath was heart-moving.”

“The more shame to them, then! And to me that I cannot do better. No, I regret nothing, save my own limitations. But, like my sister, I think I will also treat myself to a few lessons this coming year, and try to do ever so much finer work. Though I shall never sing any more really — out of my heart and because I can’t help it, you know — than I do now. Nor, if the chance were offered me, which it won’t be, would I exchange my life here for that of any *prima donna* living!”

“Preemer donners are awful rich, Bonny!” admonished Robert.

“Well, so are you, small sir, if you had sense enough to believe it! So are we all, I think.”

“Amen!” said Miss Joanna, earnestly.

But Mrs. Beckwith quietly rose and struck a few chords on the well-used instrument beside



her. There was a moment's hush; then out upon the gathering twilight floated the first strains of the familiar Doxology.

Bonny led them, but the other voices followed swiftly. Even the cracked, quavering tenor — that once had been — of old John Dolloway feared not to yield its tribute of sweet "Praise God!" to Him who had been, who ever would be, to each and all of them so close a Friend.



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